

## **THUNDERSTRUCK || Billy Hargrove by elyy08**

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**Summary:** She sighed in exasperation, shaking her head, before getting straight and opening the book sure that she would not be able to hear a single word from the lesson today, too busy thinking about how she would charge Billy fucking Hargrove.

## 1. 00 TEDDYBEAR

*[1973, Hawkins]*

THE LINOLEUM FLOOR still smelled like the acrid solvent used to clean during the night while Susan Prevett traipses through corridors, folders under one arm and steaming coffee in her hand, ready for another grueling shift.

She was hired as a nurse by the new building on the outskirts of Hawkins for some months now. She did not understand why a laboratory under the supervision of the U.S. Department of Energy had taken the trouble to hire nurses, but she soon realized something was going on.

Rather than nursing, her tasks were almost strictly bureaucratic and control, to compile folders associated with patients, feed them, entertain them and check that they did not flee for the laboratory. He had never given drugs, nor did he carry out any type of phlebotomy or at least intervened when one of them seemed to have behaviors ... 'out of the norm'. She had been given precise instructions in this regard: if there had been any problem she would have to contact the internal emergency number and within a few minutes the doctors would arrive.

Many of them by now she knew them by sight, from time to time they came to check the general conditions of their cases and they stopped to have a coffee at the nurses' desk. But none of them had never accepted their help.

Sometimes they were accompanied by security men to escort them as they took the children to the lower floors for check-ups.

Susan shuddered as she sipped her cup of coffee, passing one of the many doors on which a babyish sticker was attached, in an attempt to make the environment more welcoming and less sterile.

She still remembered as if it was the first day the horror of finding out who those little numbers scribbled on the folders were assigned to. Children.

Frowning, she went straight in the direction, asking for explanations: why would children find themselves in the custody of the energy

department? What was wrong with them for being interned without parents who never came to see them?

Dr. Brenner at least hadn't seen troubled in front of her distress, he had smiled at her as if the answer was obvious, right in front of her eyes ready to be grabbed and she was the only one who couldn't see it.

"They are sick" he explained to her with a hint of broken voice, as if there, among those children, there was his son "they came into contact with minor forms of radioactivity due to experiments conducted by foreign countries. We are helping them. Unfortunately, their parents did not survive" in front of her obvious concern, Dr. Brenner had made sure to point out that the levels of radiation in their blood is not high enough for none of his staff to be infected. Susan was so upset by the revelation that she forgot any other questions, so she was dismissed in her speechless horror.

From that day on, she could not look at those children with the same eyes and could not shake off that feeling of being in the dark.

Arrived in front of the counter behind which she would have spent most of her turn, she stopped to put down all the folders while she watched, frowning but not too surprised, the morning colleague climbing up a ladder to reach one of the tallest shelves in the metal closet where they kept most of the old annotations.

"Good morning Linda" she muttered, sipping her coffee "what are you doing ... exactly?"

The woman, a lady now close to middle age, muttered something very similar to words that Susan never thought she could repeat aloud.

"Don't see?" Linda asked, pointing to the old documents cataloged carefully "I'm doing the job that's a little scrape of Elizabeth should have done tonight!" she went back to checking the documents, mumbling until her eyes lit up when one of her fingers glazed with red stopped on the rib of one of the old notebooks "Ah! Here you are!" She descended in precarious balance from the small scale, that they always kept under the counter for this kind of eventuality, and slammed the document in front of her.

Susan didn't blink, she was used to the melodramatic mood of her

colleague. She no longer noticed it.

She had learned after endless mornings spent to put up with her complaints that if she had not shown interest in her cascade of malice towards her younger peers, she would soon have gone in search of any other person who was much more mischievous than her.

"This folder was requested by Dr. Brenner, it had to be ready this morning! I had left it written in the deliveries of that lazy, brainless goose!" the old woman complained, her hand slammed against the document as if to give more emphasis to her words.

Susan moved the object in question to Linda, starting to leaf through the nursing journal of the first patient of the morning "Interesting and not tell me ... she didn't?"

"Don't tease me, Susan!" Linda's voice rose two octaves as she waved a gnarled finger under her nose "you wouldn't want to become like that fat disgrace ..."

"Do you mind if I take care of patient number 003?" Susan interrupted, rereading more carefully the lines left by the colleague of the night shift, the continuous screaming in the ears of the old nurse began to make her confused.

Linda looked at her confused, for a moment, before quickly recovering herself as she turned, with the much-discussed folder held in her arms as if it were the most precious of treasures

"Do as you like, as far as I can tell you can even adopt it," Linda mumbled, striding towards the end of the corridor.

Susan for the first time in all morning turned her attention to her "Where are you going? There are still rooms to be arranged and morning hygiene for the children to do"

A cawing laugh rose up in the middle of the room "Ah! If the folder had been fixed before now I would come to give you a hand, but instead no, I have to patch up the mistakes of others" Linda's grin spread across her face.

Susan squeezed her eyelids, grasping the root of her nose in an attempt not to verbally chill any excuse she was raised to put off what should have been her job. As if both were unaware of the fact

that Linda would disappear for much longer than was necessary to carry a folder to the upper floors.

"And Dr. Brenner can't come and get that *damn* folder for himself?" Susan whispered between her teeth, mimicking a smile that, she was sure, it would make blood freeze in evil's vein even.

Linda stopped with her hand still on the door, any response died on her lips as she dropped the documents on the floor. The contents, mostly sheets, and photos, spilled onto the floor.

Susan watched the woman as she stood there, completely terrified.

"What the hell ..." Susan murmured, turning in the direction of the woman

"Did you hear that too?" Linda asked with eyes wide open.

Susan approached, leaving her warm coffee and patient files on the counter "What? I didn't hear anything"

Linda turned slowly to her, her face white as a corpse "O-one shot ...it was the sound of a shot, I'm sure"

Susan snorted "I'm sure it's not like that, probably it was just some door closed with too much force or some shelf that gave way"

"I can recognize the sound of a gun!" shouted the older colleague, tapping one foot on the ground.

Susan frowned at her "Oh! I didn't know that in your free time you went to practice at the shooting-range" her voice was sharp like a knife.

Linda gave her a chilling look, but in doing so, she didn't notice the door that was thrown open and hit her in the face, dropping her back on the floor. The blow had probably broken her nasal septum judging by the blood that had begun to stain her uniform and her hands, now tight on her face, as she writhed in pain.

Susan ran in her direction when a silver reverberation over poor Linda's head caught her attention. She froze, and her eyes crossed the terrified but extremely determined look of a woman, perhaps even younger than her. Her face was worn as if she hadn't slept for a long time, her eyes were sunken, her blouse was stained with blood and, shaking with trembling hands, he clutched a colt now pointed at her

colleague still whining on the ground.

"What the fuck are you doing, Susan ?! Give me one han...!" Linda's words died in her throat when she looked up and saw the gun pointed at her "No! No! I did nothing! Please"

The woman continued to look between Susan and Linda, as if trying to decide what to do and didn't expect to find them there. Then suddenly, every trace of doubt and confusion disappeared as she gripped the gun firmly with both hands.

"Where's my daughter?" the stranger asked, pointing the gun to Linda first and then to Susan, who slowly raised her hands.

"What the hell are you babbling about?" Linda screamed in fright as the stranger advanced toward her.

"Jane Ives! She's three years old now! My daughter!" this time her voice was cold with determination but betrayed a certain urgency. She had the time counted and she knew that too. Now the guards were aware of her presence if not for the confusion they must have already seen what is going on from the security cameras. Probably all the security was already on her trail "you took her away from me! My little Jane ... now I've come to get her back! Where is she?"

Linda continued to sob and rail against her, meanwhile Susan couldn't stop thinking about the woman's words and her brain had begun to process information in an infinite loop. She didn't even notice that she had spoken.

The armed woman turned her full attention to her "What did you say?" The barrel of the gun shone in her direction and for a moment Susan felt a lump in her throat. She swallowed, closing her eyes as he tried to speak again.

"The subject 011 ..."Susan whispered "is the only girl of three years ..."

"Where?" The gun trembled as the woman asked. She was on the verge of collapse.

Susan cleared her throat"Rainbow room ... you need the keys"

For a moment she read relief in the woman's eyes as if finally, she had found peace in her thoughts and Susan's heart tightened in a vice far more difficult to bear than the lump in her throat that had overwhelmed her a little earlier.

She closed her eyes, ready for the gunshot, but nothing happened. She heard Linda scream again and found the courage to open her eyes again.

The armed woman had lifted her by the arm and was dragging her towards the corridor. "Show me where she is" she threatened her with the colt aimed behind her back and suddenly Linda became quiet as a lamb, although she trembled from head to toe.

"I'll do it ... I'll do it ... but please don't hurt me ..." Linda kept repeating those words like a mantra even as they passed her, but the woman was no longer listening to her, her eyes were now fixed on the corridor behind Susan and saw nothing else.

When they disappeared around the corner, Susan finally managed to breathe again, but she had to lean against the counter so as not to lose her balance and end up unconscious on the ground. Was she terrified? Yes. Tremendously.

Susan knew for now that woman would no longer hurt her. The woman had only one goal at the moment: find her daughter. If Susan had stood aside, letting that desperate mother find her lost child, she could hope to live a little longer.

She closed her eyes, trying to metabolize what had happened and what she had learned.

Suddenly, every doubt seemed to disappear. That perfect and fragile bubble that contained all suspicion, every remorse of conscience, all fear of the truth had broken out.

With trembling hands, she grabbed the keys fastened to her belt with an extensible thread, the same copies that all the nurses in the lab had, and she headed into the corridor on the opposite side to the one where Linda and the woman had disappeared. She could still hear the nurse crying in the distance.

She began to sweat even though her skin was shivering. Her heart pounded in her ears at every step as she approached the door at the end of the corridor. She stopped, the keys still clasped in her fingers, and her gaze fixed on the teddy bear sticker attached to the dark mahogany.

She was on the horns of a dilemma.

Susan could have continued to believe in the lies of Dr. Brenner, to accept that what she had discovered today and all the suspicions of those months were too much to handle for her, to pretend not to see the desperation of a mother as she searches for her daughter, to believe that woman was a delirious fool, put the keys back and run to warn the vigilance and resume with her life.

Or she could have chosen not to close her eyes and pretend not to see what it was consuming under her nose, every day. To believe in those documents that in the last few months someone had tried to show her, but she had found hard -or didn't want to- to believe it. It would have been too irrational and monstrous to accept.

Now, with that intrusion in the laboratory, she had the opportunity to implement that crazy thought that sometimes kept her awake at night, but that she had always driven away like an annoying fly. No one would have noticed her absence, at least not immediately, not with that chaos.

As an employee nurse in the laboratory, she could take advantage of her position. She could do it. But maybe it was just the adrenaline to talk, yet at that moment, it was the necessary push to make her take that leap that she had always feared.

While she turned the key in the lock, Susan Prevett didn't know that she had made a choice that would change not only her future but also the fate of Hawkins's people.



## 2. 01 FAMILY PORTRAIT

*[30th October 1984, Hawkins]*

**EXCITED CRIES** echoed along Dearbone St. next came the laughter of younger children as they passed the monstrous figures that decorated the homes' gardens of Hawkins, Indiana.

Samantha Foster could almost taste autumn on her lips as she walked down the driveway with the leaves crunching under her red cherry converses, it had a spicy note of cinnamon and pumpkin.

Candid white drapes fluttered in the wind hanging from the neighbors' enclosure, huge pumpkins transformed into frightening effigies guarding the arcades, some had succeeded with the help of polystyrene headstones and plastic skeletons to transform their garden into a miniature cemetery.

Hawkins and its buildings burned among yellow and red in their brighter tones like some witchcraft. Mosaics of warm golden and orange shades decorated the streets where the leaves had gathered at the sides of the sidewalks or in dark brown spots when trampled by the hustle and bustle of its inhabitants.

The air was still warm, perhaps the last memory leftover from the summer. A light breeze shook her raven hair, cut into a soft bob over her shoulders, carrying the hint of loose earth and chocolate.

"I hope none of you have forgotten anything" the voice of Eric Foster, her father, resounded through the garden. Her brother, Joshua, was running out of the house with his backpack still open and his notebooks half outside. He passed the door almost stumbling over the loose laces of his shoes.

Eric didn't even have to take his eyes off the clock as he let his son get past him, so he could close the door "I'm proud to announce that we've set a new family record!" Joshua and Sam looked at each other before turning in concomitantly a skeptical look at their father "We have never been so late, well, at work I will say that the dog ran

away"

Joshua looked up from his backpack "You used this excuse yesterday," he pointed out, while Eric went down the porch stairs and approached his eldest daughter "And we don't even have a dog"

laughed as if the problem did not touch him, while he fiddled with the car keys and threw them into the air and then catch them "It will mean that we will buy it"

Sam looked up at the sky, shaking her head "As if some of us could handle a dog" she pointed to her brother behind her, still engaged in a furious struggle between the backpack and the stuff it didn't want to know about staying at inside "Joshua can barely take care of himself"

"Hey! At least I can make me a plate of mac 'n' cheese without risking setting the kitchen on fire" the boy complained.

"It happened only once" Sam pointed out.

Joshua raised his eyebrows, shrugging "But it happened"

"No arguments, not early in the morning. I'm still in my first three coffees and I don't know if I'm able to handle a family drama " Eric winked at both of them, before opening the door of his beige Ford "Don't do anything I wouldn't do" he disappeared inside the car, only to reappear immediately after "and do nothing I would do ... just stay in the middle"

"Very clear. We love you too Dad" Sam greeted him, before heading to the garage, Joshua merely waved his hand before Eric Foster returned to the car and started the engine, moving off down the driveway to The Hawkins Post.

"What's wrong, Josh?" Sam loaded the whole weight of her backpack over one shoulder, so she could bend in front of the garage door and start fiddling with the padlock "You're more crabby than usual"

"Do you know that if you decided to fix that car we wouldn't have to wake up so early?" he piped out.

Sam snorted "And you know that you shouldn't put words in business that doesn't concern you?"

Joshua crossed his arm over the chest "Well, I would say that these are my concern because I am on foot too"

"The car is mine Josh, you would walk anyway," she pointed out to him before lifting the garage door sharply. The latter stopped with a loud '*thud*' once it reached the end of the race, a cloud of dust and sawdust fell from the ceiling due to the recoil. In front of them, half-covered by an old dusty sheet, rested the metallic shape of a car.

Although the body needed a coat of polish and cleanliness, the red paint shone brightly under the layer of dust. The emblem on the engine mask, a red cross on a white background flanked by a golden-crowned serpent, shone shyly beyond the worn edge of the blanket under which it had been repaired.

A nostalgic smile escaped Sam as she looked at it.

Her Alfa Romeo Montreal. It had been her parents' last gift a few months before she got her license, as an incentive, they had told her. Her mother had gone around all the vendors to find the right car for her, and she had found that little mold-like jewel in a dealership's garage, waiting for the junkyard.

It was a project that Sam had taken to heart, that of putting it back together, but by now it had already been a few months since she put her hands on it again.

Joshua's fingers brushed over hers, she didn't know if he had done it voluntarily or not, and Sam quickly shook herself, shaking off the weight that had slammed her shoulders.

"Come on. Let's go" she cast a sad last look at the car and pulled out in front of her brother towards the bicycles. Joshua pursed his lips, avoiding a reply and followed his sister.

At the time that was their only means of transport despite his complaints.

They had entered that routine from a small suburban town for almost a year now, after their sudden transfer from Chicago.

It was not strange that, as an investigative journalist, the head of the Foster family was often forced to drag the whole family from one end of the country to the other to follow the news or the best job offer. But Hawkins wasn't exactly the kind of metropolis they were used to.

The first night they spent in the new house, a charming two-story terraced house, Sam remembered that she didn't sleep a wink for too much silence. After a few hours, with his cheeks flushed and muttering with embarrassment, Joshua had come to ask if he could sleep with her and together they had finally fallen asleep.

Normally she would never have accepted, perhaps she would have even teased him for such a request, but in the last two years, too many events had shaken the family, breaking their precarious balance as if having two teenagers wandering around the house was not in itself a time bomb ready to explode. Sam suspected that their mysterious and stormy transfer was linked not only to the sinister events that took place in the town the year before but also to his father's need to escape from reality and from the city his wife had taken from him. Probably in his utopian maternal imagination, in a small suburb where everyone knew everyone, his children would have been safer.

Sam had not walked too far on the subject, sometimes she knew she was a pain in the ass, but strangely this time she too was relieved to get away from the chaotic streets of Chicago. The scars were still too fresh.

Having found a certain serenity she quickly recreated a life there, at Hawkins. It was much easier for her to dig her space than in Pittsburgh, Chicago or Boston. The mysterious newcomer aura of a big city and her troubled history had already mounted much of the work and well before her arrival it was already on everyone's lips with the most disparate voices. Her pretty face, nice clothes, and her facade had done the rest. In the end, every high school was just like any other: either you ate or were eaten, and she preferred to be at the top of the food chain.

"I wanted to go to the Arcade after school" Joshua stopped at the side of the parking lot before continuing to middle school, he turned to Sam who had already got off her bike and was taking it to the racks.

"Ok, I have to work, but then I can pick you up" she muttered. Joshua rolled his eyes, but Sam ignored him, securing the wheel to the fence "Listen I know it's a nuisance, it is for me too, but Daddy kills me if he knows you're back alone" she gave him a sharp smile, shrugging her shoulders "it's not my fault if you don't have friends"

In response, he gave her a tongue, and she responded with the same gesture before bursting out laughing.

Her brother greeted her with a final wave of his hand, without turning around, as he headed for middle school "See you tonight, witch"

Sam shook her head, smiling slightly "See you tonight, loser"

### 3. 02 CALIFORNIA PCE 235

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="4a870e1d5d52ec6323378f1c0141f140"span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"SAM ADJUSTED/span her backpack and ventured into the parking lot. It didn't take her long to see the indomitable basket of curly hair of her friend resting on the usual wall. If there was one thing she had noted, it was that certain things to Hawkins never style="box-sizing: border-box;" /br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="c71076db8c8144a049678ab681511c47""Did you notice anything new?" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="a11dbd931d1ae3e2a14371c4cc8fdd89"Maria distractedly looked at the parking lot "Mh ...let's see... Nancy Wheeler and Steve Harrington are the usual lovebirds, Tommy is still an idiot, you're always late and I'm tired of this day already" she paused, finally turning to look at her "no, I would say that it's all boringly normal" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="d740287333547bc3aa41160e7e79bd3b"If there was something that she still hadn't been able to decipher in that Indiana town, it was certainly Maria Sinclair and her behavior. Maria did not seem touched by any event, as if everything around her did not touch her. And often she was a disarming sincerity, almost embarrassing at style="box-sizing: border-box;" /But Sam found her dry sense of humor and her urgent need to express everything that was on her mind, extremely fascinating. /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-

id="f89a6066c8c8d16be194375ca0064490"While she was looking for the packet of cigarettes carefully hidden in her bag, her friend's surprise sigh forced Sam to look up, peeping for the cause of so much horror "Oh god, harpies at 3 o'clock" Maria exclaimed, not bothering to lower her voice while with a nod of her head indicated the trio composed of Carol, Tina and Susie, resting comfortably on a latter's machine. The three girls had started to glance at them, without bothering to hide it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="9bee1f91033e5676d8260a1cd5339dee"Sam turned around completely, ready to face them. She responded to their defiant look with equal determination and aversion "The things we do for the team ..." the foster girl sighed, hinting an attempt at greeting by raising her chin. Despite her words, she was able only to devote a grimace to them far from a smile, at least to keep the quiet life in the cheerleader team. In response, Maria barely stifled a grunt, struggling to move her fingers in a disturbing and forced sign of salute. But her face remained stoic. Sam burst out laughing as she looked down at her friend's disgusted face "Thanks for the attempt but what was that?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="e5c8d3f0d93bbe70dd37923a1b6625fc""My highest tolerance towards them" Maria answered her flatly./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="6bac65f6d97dbfd0caee562aa2db42cc"Sam looked up at the sky, unable to restrain herself from smiling at the decidedly unfriendly expressions of the three girls before the latter decided they had devoted too much time to them and returned to talk to each other./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="80b273875f2427f549924764ab4dd01e"She didn't know how Maria had resisted all that time alone in their group before her arrival, given her open rivalry with those who, she liked to admit it

or not, were the most popular girls in the school./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="e400dfbbb6e4dede9982ebce97dde573" With her arrival and her rapid climb to scholastic success in the student body, the podium on which Carol and the others had settled comfortably had received a nasty shock and this had immediately put them on alert./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="719a69aafb9ca6b64621406b0f64d7b" The competition had started as soon as she applied for the cheerleader auditions. Had it been for the queen bee's trio, she would not have been accepted, but the last decision was up to the coach Simmons. They had tried to isolate her, but Sam had not let herself be intimidated by their first-woman attitudes and Maria had come to her aid. She had shown them that not only she was a tough girl but that thwarting their attempts to keep her from staying in the team had become almost a fun pastime. The hostilities then peaked when she became engaged to Alexander Ross, as well as Tina's ex-boyfriend./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="7b4a7994da23d77cf848be70e51f93f6" Whether she wanted it or not, their difficulty in enduring themselves soon turned into a popularity contest without them realizing it. As long as those three believed themselves to be the queens of Hawkins HighSchool, they would look for any subtle ways to make life impossible for them. And Sam wouldn't let style="box-sizing: border-box;" /What occurred every day at this little Hawkins school. It was war./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="52392befadac7f53a9e1b75fb37404dc" And then what was that '3 o'clock thing'?" she laughed lighting her cigarette, her eyebrows raised, still incredulous for the expression 'so nerd' used./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-



id="2c9deea76b576ae4ec5db8c7ace693af""Oh look, my cousins came over for lunch over the weekend and Lucas did nothing but talk to that croaking device shouting numbers and codes. It seemed to me that he did so much secret agent ... but I think I will never repeat it. I regretted it the moment I said it" Maria justified herself by leaning her shoulder against the fence./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="46605fb0e3c17bc89d4a25f77c5e1cac""Fortunately, I wouldn't know what to do if you left me alone with those three to give you to Dungeons Dragons" Sam teased her, nudging her with the elbow./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="bfb89b43f4e1d006b53947adef664d30""Who gives himself to Dungeons Dragons?" Alex's solid, heavy arm encircled her shoulders and nearly knocked her cigarette to the floor in surprise. The leather white sleeve of the official Basketball player jacket was cold against her bare neck and made her shiver. Alex smiled, mocking, leaving a wet kiss on her cheek "I hope not you Sammy ... I should beat those nerds to have convinced you to do such a stupid thing"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="52a99015dc7ce3a76113e3132d4ad5c7"Maria stared at him, frowning "Oh my god, what are you thirteen? You don't have to watch over everything she does" she twisted her mouth, searching her gaze "her father already thinks enough about it"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="63c0067e505875406ec6b05bf3b7ac99"Alex brought her face close to Sam, his laughter was choked by her hair as he chuckles in her ear "What's wrong? I don't want her to get confused with such... childish things"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="0753bb840c3dbfc02e750ef0c27863f7""Don't worry, Alex,

nobody here wants to join the club" Samantha reassured him./p  
p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="e0c401c1c593eefa0094d838b542ba5b""Better this way ..." he gave her one last kiss, on the corner of her mouth, before straightening up "so girls, I hope you kept yourself free for tomorrow night"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="1e074f7c5092351ba599d0532801e8ed"Maria raised an eyebrow, confused, exchanging a look with Sam. She just lifted her head, crossing the gaze of her boyfriend from under the fringe "Tomorrow night? What's tomorrow night?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="0a2ce11dd892211179d60787bbc658f7"Alex stared at them, confused as if trying to figure out if they were teasing him "Don't you know yet? Tina will have a party at her house. The flyers say 'drunk as a skunk' and I'm going to follow the advice"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="7076999d53cbe6d3e1ade1ac983b294e"Maria exchanged an unmistakable look with Sam, her mouth wide open for the lack of words, then found them all together "That ugly...!" But the rest of Maria's sentence was swallowed by the roar of an engine./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="ee17af575832c75e53351705944aa55f"The roar echoed in Sam's rib cage, against her ribs, until her jaw trembled. The only sound made her shiver. She turned around, searching for the cause of all that noise. The eyes of the entire school body were facing the car that was entering the parking lot./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-

id="8ac018c1acd836fee878e640a4c4f5af"A dark blue Camaro's body shone under the morning sun, slowing to a stop not far from them, giving Sam a front-row seat. No such car had crossed Hawkins's streets in the past year, she was sure, or she would be reminded of a car like that otherwise./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="71c1848f180ef1b5d12110f5ec1a1054"The car door opened and the world slowed for a moment, the sound of the boot against the asphalt reverberated all over the yard, swallowing any other noise. The whole parking lot was holding its breath as a boy left the car. He inhaled from the cigarette he held in his hands, and clouds of smoke came out of his nostrils to curl around his face./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="21822c391d2fa0902f1c0cde5b8327a4""Who is that?" Sam heard Susie ask, in front of them. Judging by the looks he had captured, it was the same question everyone was asking./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="c9b4dd6af49ce56de749badcc5ca9125"Even the sun had gone pale, as if he feared confrontation with his golden curls and bronzed skin. Looking at him, Sam thought that summer had suddenly returned, the last sultry and salty summer wind./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="4638954b7f8135337c731a974c89ac39"He looked around without really seeing the environment around, but well aware of the curious looks that he had captured with his mere presence. There was not the slightest hint of embarrassment in his person, he didn't care, on the contrary, he seemed almost to take pleasure of his show while inhaling the last pull of his cigarette before throwing it untreated against the style="box-sizing: border-box;" /He passed in front of the trio of cheerleaders, whose neck almost unscrewed as they followed the movement of his hips, tightened in a pair of blue jeans./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size:

18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="4bb346e52c6636e028227713dda677b3""Oh my God, look at them, they would need a rag," Maria remarked in disgust as her eyes could not get away from the scene. If Carol had continued to chew gum with so much emphasis, her jaw would probably have fallen to the ground./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="8c0f45937da67e323b6a361eb93f471d"Sam took one last look at the stranger, now a confused figure among the rest of the students, before turning back to his boyfriend./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="e5bf25d8303ef54ac9d31af0dba8edd6""What a blowhard," sighed Alex, tightening his grip on her shoulder more tightly./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="ccaf9dd39250b28fcc5a8504b3015454""Are you jealous?" She teased him, bringing her cigarette to her lips, only then realized that it had been completely consumed by the wind. As she threw it against the wall, Maria gave her one of those knowing smiles./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="1ee457e3049b6cbb4d9d53cf1725590c""I don't need that kind of reputation" Alex scoffed lifting a shoulder, he peeked above it one last time anyway./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-id="17fc99c28846997fa8f1f83fe60d68f7"Sam rolled her eyes, slipping away from the boy's possessive grip "Come on, I don't want to slip into Tina's drool trail"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px;" data-p-

id="d41d8cd98f00b204e9800998ecf8427e" /p

## 4. 03 I KNOW YOU WERE TROUBLE

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e383bfc1ac1e09b2f340231d2a3c21dd"span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"WHEN THEY ENTERED/span the school, Alex was left behind to greet the 'boys' of the basketball team, while Sam and Maria went to the American literature style="box-sizing: border-box;" /"Well, the morning turned out to be full of surprises at the end." Maria gave her a sideways look as she took her arm, barely holding back a smile "some nasty, some incredibly pleasant..."br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="86d62a5a74681813af9796391ee6fa9c"Sam looked up at the sky, exasperated, unable to stifle an embarrassed laugh "OK. Ok. You caught me peeking at the newcomer, I'm human too, okay? Can we change the subject now?"br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="eb2f22831374100fc3cca677aacab3d0""Oh yes, like Tina's party?" Maria pretends to appear surprised banging his fist against his palm as if the subject had only come back to mind at that moment./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="70f7d20c486226bf9e24b915d530b269""It's a big problem, I don't know if I'll be able to prepare something in time..." Sam muttered, absently biting her thumbnail. Her mind kept reviewing the garments in her closet, but no one seemed fit to sketch a Halloween costume worthy of being called such. Probably everyone else had been working on their disguises for days./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica,

Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="62939efe6d13dac9a4b548f860a13fda""Oh no, you HAVE to prepare something, we have to show that grin that her tricks don't work" Maria stated watching her indignantly./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="cab35192f92127b701f36712982bec13""You're committed to this popularity race, didn't you?" Sam scoffed, giving her an oblique look./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3e1b4881d929e48c8dc625921ee9fb93""You can bet your beautiful white buttocks" Maria's expression hardened, her brows furrowed and her eyes sparkled with determination. That reaction made Sam suspect that there was something more below "maybe later we can go searching for something in town"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7cb9084a0e828fca38aaed2bafae2dcf"Sam moaned, shrugging her shoulders "I can't I'm at work this afternoon ... tonight?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e545846c4ed845a0e49895a734769168""Tonight I'm on duty at the arcade ... I knew I shouldn't have accepted that shift change with Twister Keith ... oh boy" Maria stopped in the doorway of the classroom and nearly Sam fell on her. Maria's mouth was half open and the corners of her lips rose in complete amazement./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="64a8b9049e3f4590cbe3062f57bd032b""What's got into you?" Sam grunted her forehead, staring at her in confusion./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="64a8b9049e3f4590cbe3062f57bd032b"

data-p-id="f35517e13a69cd69e33cdc26301d08b7"Maria lifted her chin, making a sign to Samantha's desk "Look who's sitting in your seat"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f3f2f16a3e3ae2baf08ea13e06849c4f"Sam stood on tiptoe, peering over his friend's shoulder, and there, with his legs stretched out under the table and his arm resting on the back of the chair, there was the much-talked-about newcomer./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c0dbe26803cb7cceed874785b282314""Oh no! No, absolutely no" Sam exclaimed, shaking her head. Her hands squeezed her friend's arm for a moment, shaking it just as if that would make her believe she could wake up from that nightmare./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="93b108b1333d215be941c904f19a39bd""I don't want to miss this," Maria murmured, almost jumping on the spot, stepping aside to leave the field open. She took her place silently in the counter next to the blond one, without detaching her eyes from the two./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9dccd5a13ad071c326d7cf93ed8c4060"As she advanced into the classroom, Samantha could almost hear the rest of her companions holding their breath, style="box-sizing: border-box;" / She had made some poor unfortunate people cry right there, at school, when someone thought they could walk over her. Samantha responded to the fire only if provoked, for this, she had decided, that she would go-slow with the stranger. After all, how could he not know the layout of the seats in their classroom? If he had moved immediately the thing would have been resolved quickly./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9dccd5a13ad071c326d7cf93ed8c4060"As she advanced into the classroom, Samantha could almost hear the rest of her companions holding their breath, style="box-sizing: border-box;" / She had made some poor unfortunate people cry right there, at school, when someone thought they could walk over her. Samantha responded to the fire only if provoked, for this, she had decided, that she would go-slow with the stranger. After all, how could he not know the layout of the seats in their classroom? If he had moved immediately the thing would have been resolved quickly./p



data-p-id="89ea7609273509cae465451316a0b41f"Sam stopped in front of the desk showing off a frozen and sharp smile "Hi"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="84874437748d8053846a916a384045c0"He didn't even bother to appear interested in that intrusion, not at least until his eyes — a crystalline ocean blue, noticed Sam — looked her up and down and then again, all the way backward. It was then that his face was painted with a feral smile, like a hunter who is watching his prey "Hi ..."/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="38f5930d2b7b1a7a3de01fe02b5f2009"His voice was low, masculine and there was a deep note in that one word dragged for a little longer than necessary. For a brief moment, that sound made her knees tremble. But the feeling only lasted for a couple of fleeting seconds./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="74e5c8e8dd143d702acb895c49a441ad""I know you're new ..." Sam started./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="53189c6ffd778489748885a738da8784""Billy" he interrupted "Billy Hargrove"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c5536a231c785490a2fa02441ed25258"Sam gave him a sharp smile "I know you're new ... em style="box-sizing: border-box;"Billy/em and probably no one has yet explained to you how things are going here, but the short version is: that's my place and you have to move"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c5536a231c785490a2fa02441ed25258"Sam gave him a sharp smile "I know you're new ... em style="box-sizing: border-box;"Billy/em and probably no one has yet explained to you how things are going here, but the short version is: that's my place and you have to move"/p

data-p-id="b7a754e0e78defee8fd77142171e1bfa" He didn't move an inch, on the contrary, he took his time to look her up again. Finally, he leaned forward, crossing his arms over the counter. "Make me move, then" his tongue snaking out of his mouth to run across his bottom lip./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1c30a9f060bed153e6a4b1e2288028b7"" Oh shit" Maria, beside her, swore between her teeth, but Sam almost didn't hear her. Her gaze was glued to that of the blonde. She bent too, her hands clawing the corners of the counter, her face stopped at a few inch away from his face./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8618575961cfb5e360388868801513a7"" Believe me when I tell you that you wouldn't like it, span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"em style="box-sizing: border-box;"Hargrove/em/ span" Sam warned him, deadly serious./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="59507e0aaa404527d72276a3f5e5f473" Billy slips curl from its signature smirk to a grin./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="377d3df1518056eae0b768ecbfdce9ed"" Believe me when I tell you that instead, we would both love it" the blond contradicted her, biting his lower lip while his ocean blue eyes kept sticking to Sam's./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8ce0683bab6c1dfac673fa03e03e0f71" A chorus of amused 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;"ooooh/em' rose from some benches at the back of the classroom. By now they both knew they had caught the attention of the whole class for this little diatribe of theirs, but neither of them seemed to care./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="153db40ba1a3014d5f5c27eb6f0aad66"Sam tightened her grip on the wood, her knuckles whitened, trying to summon up every bit of her will to avoid taking that same desk and throwing it at his style="box-sizing: border-box;" /br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1579836517a3b5d6175418acff061599""What's going on here?" blood froze in her veins, Alex was standing behind her with his jaw clenched./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a340c931f5092216d4922f749dedbbec""Alex, don't worry, I'm dealing with it" but her words didn't touch him at all, Alex's hazel eyes didn't move from the boy in her seat./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="800f8be8352006ada68a515ccd5a47e5"Billy's expression changed, he seemed bored by that sudden interruption "Let me guess..." he paused, pretending to think as he got up from the desk "...you're her boyfriend" he stopped a few inches from Alex's face, his legs spread and arms at his sides. Neither of them seemed intent on retreating./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="88d773d213cfb5c02d38d96b3a235920"Sam caught the danger and grabbed Alex by the sleeve of his jacket, trying to pull him back "Forget it, you'll get in trouble"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0d20f81464861f19f7097fe50324bae0"He shook her hands off, advancing one step towards Billy, whose smile had

returned only to tease his challenger./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="ce92782d6ad42fab4b4c9d0c5f6dff7c"Alex took a step forward "Don't get close to her, do you understand?" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3ade563ec33fdab30fe7f06430dc2e5c"Actually... Billy left for a moment that his gaze left Alex's, only to look for hers "it was your girlfriend who came looking for me"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2e59d19f5d63fdb3d282da3022ea1cca"Alex got stuck between them, occupying Sam's entire field of vision with his back./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="5d18203492c0a384622e1db3f550f4ff"Sam still managed to capture the movement of the hands of his boyfriend, he tightened them around the white collar of the blond making him collide against the counter "ALEX NO!"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="382539e58fd4e364260209cd99fff57a"Billy didn't seem worried about the iron grip of the fingers around his white shirt, under the denim jacket, on the contrary, he laughed while Alex shook him "Talk to me, not with her"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="300084656ce9841d682229735153e29b"Otherwise?" The blond challenged him, lifting his chin./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d264375673d7deb0b031552488716e5f"Sam saw Billy's

right hand clenching into a fist and charging back, ready to strike. She stepped forward to intervene./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0a7b332a3218a9fb4e4aa748f00c9759""Sorry for the delay guys, then today... What are you doing?" The professor's voice cut the silence lowered into the classroom like a knife. The two contenders fixed themselves for a handful of very long seconds before leaving their grip on each other "Are there any problems, Mr. Ross?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e8286ae357631f011cb425fb72c6036a"Alex's jaw tightened "No sir" he muttered./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4f65d9589746c180f5ab69d35949bc04""Hargrove ...right? You are the new one. Do you want to say something?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f5308abb714c7266c52a694520cd94e9""No... em style="box-sizing: border-box;"sir/em" Billy spat out./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="859073e39e6400af30ffbbcaa567f21f"The professor gave them one last look over his glasses "Well, then go back to your seats"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="450ce36ce41174f3593650425c8be04d"Billy's tongue darted between his teeth as a strange light shone in his eyes "Oh, I was almost forgetting" he spat on the counter, pretending to polish it with the sleeve of his jacket. Sam glanced at the professor, too busy rearranging his belongings on the desk to pay attention to Billy's low

voice "All yours Mr. Ross ..." before turning to head to one of the last benches, he gave her a last smile to which she would have gladly responded to, but which would surely have provided her with a one-way ticket for detention./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="366e110361b0e0e7ba156057987abdda"Alex was furious, and remained there, without moving, for a time that seemed infinite to her and Sam thought he would tackle Billy to finish what they had started. But in the end, the reason regains possession of him./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7c79c46397d0a33e649bc7669b54c754"Alex ..." Sam whispered trying to catch his attention./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d346a574af2966744d3c53a13742605b"He didn't even glance at her before going to sit on the other side of the classroom./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="55923142799e5d58bbe59b41b7445207"Sam put her pack on the ground and took her seat in the chair, carefully avoiding the opalescent stain of saliva that now adorned her bench./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4a8086dc975e39ce4714f3eb293c15cc"She bent to the side, starting to rummage through her stuff for the notebook, and in doing so her eyes met Billy Hargrove's again. He was staring at her with that unbearable, amused style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Sam felt again a flash of electricity igniting every nerve, to the tip of her hair, without looking away from him, she pretended to have found what she was looking for and instead of extracting the didactic material, her middle finger came out of the folder, seasoned with a contemptuous smile. Billy seemed to find it even more fun./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size:

18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fe2fb0b2c23a6c7378117604a6f2d38b">She sighed in exasperation, shaking her head, before getting straight and opening the book sure that she would not be able to hear a single word from the lesson today, too busy thinking about how she would charge Billy

em style="box-sizing: border-box;"fucking/em Hargrove./p

## 5. 04 JOANNA

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d55f56af413b79ced1c54f04fd6a4bfb"span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"THE BELL RANG/span between the walls of the Hawkins High School and Sam was among the first to stand up with notebooks still in her arms, but when she reached Alex, he was already almost at the door of the classroom./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="02c444909bedccbd813ce060ef9f2a71"Alex, please, listen to me ..." she begged him, he barely glimpsed her over his shoulder, putting his hands in the pocket of the Tigers jacket, the high school basketball team./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="658ee0efb6fa7cc8d664d63200aacbf9"Not now, I don't have the time and I'm not in the right mood," he murmured, not trying to hide his irritation and almost slammed the door against the wall when he opened it. Sam stopped, puffing her frustration, she knew it would be a waste of time trying to reason with him when he couldn't even look at her face. Let alone listen to her reasons./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f91a99d789938a4ef6d8e66476a87197"No luck, eh?" Maria interjected, bending to whisper in her ear. Sam jumped, too busy watching his boyfriend's back disappear down the corridor to notice her presence./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="209718c5c4e4b32088c7a0bf21218861"One day of these you will give me a heart attack" she warned, reassembling herself "Either way, no. He has one of his 'em style="box-sizing: border-



box;"moment/em'. I'll try again when he calms down a bit"/p  
p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="98fd827ff94f7bf0f8a5201ee131953b"Maria nodded against her shoulder, resting her chin on it, before pulling an elbow on her style="box-sizing: border-box;" /"What the hell Maria ..." she hissed, bringing her hands to her struck side. If she had continued like this, at the end of the day, she would have found herself bruised./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="50272a7f7a12f6cbb1bb0885e1c229b6""Sam, don't look behind us. Sugar Boots is coming " her friend warned and, of course, Sam ignored it. When she turned around, Billy Hargrove was staring at her. Sam frowned, raising her chin. If he wanted the second round this time she was ready. But the blonde kept amble, without taking his eyes off her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="211bf39fa66338fade39d88f1891d928"As Billy passed her, he leans towards Sam, chewing his gum on her face "See you soon little bitch" his laugh was hot and arrogant, like anything in him./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="6bff78754756661a38caa16593e16116"Sam's jaw clenched and her knuckles blanched against the ribs of the books "What fucking problem do you have Hargrove?!" she yelled back as he crosses the door. Billy didn't even give any sign of having heard it, but Sam could almost imagine that arrogant smile on his face./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="04e504fef78965570baa4b30a12c6241""Well, it can't be said that it wasn't an intense first hour," Maria remarked, shrugging./p  
p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3cb29e458ba9423625c6a210ddf26e6d""Fuck that shit, he hasn't figured out whom he's dealing with yet," Sam replied, starting to walk again, and Maria followed her, a few steps behind./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2dd337dbfcdaf15eb5808beffff158eb""They were about to leave the classroom when someone pushed Sam, making her almost lose balance and drop her notebooks on the ground with a thud. Maria was quick to grab her arm and keep her from coming to the same end, helping her to get up. Sam glared at the culprit filled by fury. She recognized Carol's red curls even before her face and ironic voice. "Oops, how careless, I didn't see you" she puts her hand to her mouth, pretending to be sorry, only to burst out laughing and disappear from the classroom, dragging Susie behind her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="08607c19dd393989a3b8255b5f97c87e""Fantastic! Those two saw the whole scene. It's only a matter of time before Tina knows I've had a fight with Alex. Because of that asshole, by the way" she sighed, bending to pick up her stuff, still scattered on the ground./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f7f68a54ff35629ab0e8b8dcb833910f"Maria didn't seem bothered by what happened "I think she would have known it anyway" she admitted, kneeling down to help her "You weren't exactly ... discreet"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7ff46d09d2919648d8f4bcc3f3c64a02"Sam glared at her, angrily grabbing a sheet "Thank you, really, you are very helpful" her irony was thick like her fringe./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica,

Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="17427363decd3cb0d0ab987501bf80e7""Always happy to lend a hand" she stared at her, gave her an impassive look./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1eab13c20ae8f7dfd9ec32021bef9a9a""And did you hear him?!" Sam asked in an irritated voice./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3a2d0306803ea99bcf1ff5049c80b212"Maria nodded, raising her eyebrows "Oh yes I heard it. And I was excited for you"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c3b1814d7b30d3f39fe9480d1e57d46f""You should be on my side" she scolded as she lifted herself from the floor, the brunette handed her the rest of her stuff, doing the same./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c5cc76b0c64d03fceb7175a87e64a27""Well, I'm not saying I'm not. He has an attitude, but I still thought that you would have started to make-out on the counter at any moment" Maria gave her an endearing smile "There was something in the air"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fe8215a566d727d227e333657b6db354"Sam tore the last book out of her hands "Yes, the murder"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="b81f7b6c2f00e5f0a5ff97156286ba28"Maria laughed, unconvinced "If you say so ..."/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4964ee4423c0ddcf79cb00ef22c0976e""Wait," Sam and

Maria turned toward the soft, feeble voice behind them./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e2a66b2ad87a6fceb0595475cec29cb"Sam had already seen the blonde girl in front of them a couple of times, probably they had shared some class with her but at the moment she couldn't remember which ones. She didn't pay much attention to others and the girl, in particular, had nothing more or less than the rest of the students. A larger-sized sweater, blue jeans, second-hand shoes, and the hair bobbed away from her face, slightly pink from embarrassment and lips bent in a shy smile. "You forgot this ..." the blonde pointed out, holding out a pen rolled under one of the benches./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="99d58d9df6b5247258183cb6b684fd9c"Sam raised an eyebrow, looking at the girl's hand in front of her, trying to understand her intentions. But she stood still, shifting her weight from one foot to the other a little uncomfortable. In the end, Sam decided that this was just a kind gesture and took back the object "Thanks ..." Samantha finally murmured, but stopped, noticing she didn't know the girl's name./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7e408403e4c7d7957c3ccb5895b53c6f"The blonde's gaze shone, catching her embarrassment "Joanna" she introduced herself stretching out her hand again./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="de6404fc1ade4c6752a482661a82b638"Sam squeezed it, astonished by so much formality "Sam" she replied./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="bc22f1f82c55c9b1d1b6d7e921aacd3a""Oh, I don't shake hands," Maria remarked as she cast an unconvinced look at Joanna's

arm, now tense in her direction./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="727c32ca1ce03220edad3a06a9676f5c"The blonde withdrew her brows furrowed "Oh ok..."/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c311a1f8fd61d17d3e4831e85c987b2a""Maria anyway," Sinclair greeted, sketching a smile./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8971abaa8d69a8dac74bdc506daac6b5"Joanna squeezed the handle of the bag more firmly on her shoulders, moving in place and giving them another uncomfortable glance "Yes ... I already knew ... it's hard not to know your names" she admitted./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="485c71e861b310bdd8231e3f71b72e02""Oh, well ... thanks ...?" this time was her turn to look uneasy, Sam casually brought a lock behind her ear trying to hide the slight blush on the cheeks before breath in and regaining her facade "Then well we see each other around" she waved before turn towards Maria that had already taken a few steps away, waiting for her lean against the door./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="95c4cc921b0444912b58b7842f25dadf""If I were you I would stay away from the newcomer" Joanna's voice had become improvised hard and sure. Sam froze. The air suddenly became heavy and awkward./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fb41f7e7d565ed0a5b5403c0f446b523"Sam frowned, studying the girl over her shoulder. "Excuse me?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4942961fe83963c43f10baf34362225c"The blonde girl looked around, wary, but the class was now empty. There were only them. Joanna took a step forward "It just my advice but you know how hard they can make your life here when you're new or ... well ..." she made a vague gesture with her hands, this time her words sounded uncertain, vague./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="502173a419c032868bc2d1b2e9fdf9d5"Maria quickly cut the distance between them, standing side by side with Sam, towering proudly and confident "Is it a threat?" she inquired with a raised eyebrow./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="74450e160006d4e62e0348458a1cf416"Her accusation destabilized Joanna, her hazel eyes widened, and she blinked, open her mouth a couple of times without being able to find the words "What?! ... no! ..."/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7ec4006e5a3f1e2455920a303196424c"Sam put her hand on Maria's forearm, giving her a reassuring look, and she retreated back "It's okay Maria ..." Samantha's eyes returned to Joanna "Let her talk"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="de1a3eef7398d4c2514001c22eabc58f"Joanna bent a corner of her mouth in a silent thanks as she returned to torture her fingers./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f869f42e3dde51748e56dde82c38b69b"Maria looked at

her suspiciously, crossing her arms "And how do you know?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d9c4ea6008fe728cb49f1b6f807d8cb9"Joanna retreated between her shoulders, bending her head "It's late ... I have to go. I hope you will listen to my advice" she gave them one last glance and ran away before one of them could investigate further./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="bfb04203252f48e1f128ec79a6a39882""Well, it was weird" Maria scoffed, shaking her head./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3713b4c819d110014a3bec9cde2358c8"Sam raised her eyebrows, sighing "You could say that" but Joanna's words kept ringing in her head. It was only the first hour but Sam was already tired of hearing about Billy Hargrove, but something told her that Hawkins High School had just begun with him./p

## 6. 05 ZOMBIE BOY

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="45acd3f005a2381f3367e076ade406d6"span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"JOSHUA FOSTER/span rummaged in his bag, an old and worn-out military green backpack, looking for his Walkman. He peeked in front of him, trying to avoid eye contact with any of his companions./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="427df14a09acce93a8925d41f6a0afab"He hated Hawkins Middle School./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3e5a2feacacbed23d23a4f00e9dfde05"It was small and stuffy. Everyone knew everything and it made him crazy. In Chicago everything was easier, he could mix with the crowd, decide with whom to talk. Instead, in that town dispersed in the middle of nowhere, he was the latest novelty./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0dda0bf5210e4c446a09e683ed4d45e1"He wasn't like Sam, his sister was born to be the center of attention, whether she wanted it or not, to keep expectations high. Even as a child she had proved to be far more tough and resourceful than the rest of the kids her age./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3f89113871be3c58cf221c202d5e47dc"Sam was only eight years old when his father was called to work by the school because she had fought with a child, Patrick Smith, a fifth class boy because he made fun of her. Joshua was five years old, but he still remembered his mother's expression when dad called home.



Stephany Roth seemed worried./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e4ee58d67024ca0bbce98459bccdf6d0" When they went to pick up his sister from school Joshua was sitting in the back seat and was watching from the window Stephany dragging Sam by the hand. Her sister got off with two scratches on her cheeks, a cut on her eyebrow, some bruises on her arms and blood coming out of her nose but nothing broken. Joshua could not see Patrick that morning, but some time later he discovered that his parents had been forced to change school because he was terrified of meeting Sam in the corridors./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9b7e3f2b2356a43265a50ecb36a96454" His sister had always been a tough girl, as much as he hated to admit it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2a882dae523cc0bd467a6c0ea20c6e46" And he... he had always hidden behind her shadow, and he had been well. He preferred to stay home alone, with headphones on his ears and his beloved comics, than to go out with his peers to create some kind of trouble like Sam./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a50e2e07dcff8f7a27a2dc15a4c68f4d" He searched with more urgency among his stuff. The buzz of laughter, the excited shouts and the constant rush of people towards the entrance of the school were starting to make him nervous./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="183bfc4d2cd73bdb2067da6efb568fa5" A couple of girls passed him, giving him a shoulder, and almost the Walkman slip from his hands. He caught it on the fly for some kind of miracle. He glared at the girls who had not even noticed his presence and slipped

the headphones over his style="box-sizing: border-box;" /As the notes of 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;"Born in the USA/em' invaded his eardrums, he breathed a sigh of relief./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8cd13696d1f2bd21ebc10fb20644ad6d""You'll see, you'll make new friends," his father had reassured him as they packed up the last boxes of his toys and models./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="08192d216f39f8117f7b0601c90b3454"Joshua had stared at him with raised eyebrows "If you say so" he had puffed skeptically with a shrug. Neither of them had probably ever believed it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fb1e37834ca196dfcba132cdbdf1039d"From the very first day, Joshua had decided he would hate that place: by the end of the third hour, three had already asked him if it was true that they had moved because his father had discovered who knows what international Reagan plot with Russia and China, someone had dared to assume that they were secret agents and a second girl had asked him if it was true that his mother had been murdered. Every hope of a new and rich social life had dissipated amid inappropriate local curiosity, and he could not be more pissed off./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="cc2c759bbfd8f537362eae9d1255e252"No wonder he had decided at the end of the day not to dedicate more than a few glances to the rest of his companions. If that was the average intelligence, he preferred to remain an outcast and die locked in his room with his supplies of Toaster Strudel, Dr. Pepper and his comics. The rest of the world could also have fun inventing the worst rumors about it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1c1815c27d56f780a2c4def47fd45e61"His alienation from

others had done nothing but add fuel to the burning hotbed of stupidity and boredom in that city. Now no one dared to speak to him, only a few curious glances as he crossed the corridors and a few small laughs after a whisper in the ear. Nothing he couldn't handle./p

data-p-id="614e9239dfa012b361055158b2e09710" He snorted, placing his backpack on the ground with a thud as he opened his locker and began to select books for the next lessons. But with his head was already in the afternoon, out of style="font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" /Perhaps he would have managed to sneak away from a few lessons, of course, if Sam caught him he would certainly have been a very, very, very dead boy. But she shouldn't have been out before the sixth hour and her father would have worked until dinner as the rest of the month. Joshua would have to sneak through the fire door that the teachers always left ajar, with the alarm off, to go out to smoke. He should have acted while the rest of the class headed for the gym for the last hour of gymnastics./p

data-p-id="6028334f7894383f61a49e44276d12cb" He smiled, satisfied with his perfect plan when, in closing the cabinet, he realized that a boy was standing beside him. Joshua hadn't paid much attention before, he had spotted out of the corner of his eye that someone had been there for a while, but he had learned to ignore certain things./p

data-p-id="09983819ccb0d680e50a3d95f38bc3d5" But now that he noticed it he couldn't help but think that it had been there for quite a long time now./p

data-p-id="499d01ff3905993fa208418cbc8fcc0" The boy was still, froze, staring at a piece of newspaper he held in his hands. /p

18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="51517f27b36098e81f7de2e652fb2c90"Before he even read the name on the article, Joshua had already recognized him. He was Will Byers, perhaps the only boy more badmouthed apart him./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7a499ca98c5456831990b4747da93e60"You had to be blind, deaf or live in a cave in the dark to not know the story of the boy believed dead and returned 'miraculously' to life. That story, along with other mysterious disappearances, had shaken the whole town last year. It was that same absurd story that sparked his father's journalistic flair./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="082dee8de362436fcce532dae859bcfc"Joshua stood there for a few more seconds, watching him, frowning./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a3554276385b27908167e07246870a7a"Will kept staring at that piece of paper, rubbing the edges with his fingers, as if he didn't know whether to throw it or stay there, to glide at it nervously with his eyes. He was even casually biting the inside of his cheek, lost in some kind of thoughts./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f0febc82b2e50c5ef01552480d87bac"Joshua roused himself, realizing he had fixed the Byers boy too long. One thing he hated most of all if he discovered others doing it to him and didn't want to be caught doing it. He picked up the pack from the ground and turned, taking a few steps forward, before stopping and taking another look over his shoulder./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="336fa76aea2c3f3cf6b8f4222c63ca9a"Byers was still

there./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="67da8a6912c8871a178da2e858af6eca" He stamped his foot nervously on the ground, looking around. He knew that at times Will suffered from some 'crises', but nobody knew exactly what they consisted of. What was he had at that moment? Joshua didn't know how to behave if that was the case. He gave him another look./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="cf7ad1dc23ed3bbf6c84ed2dbaced9aa" Will still seem paralyzed, his hands were trembling slightly and his back was straight and stiff as if he were ready to escape at any moment. Under the heavy shadow of his eyebrows, Joshua could see his shining eyes. Yet he seemed to be the only one to have noticed./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1b53bd25473320b671e2d7fc59346835"" To hell with it..." Joshua hissed between his teeth as he lowered the headphones and placed them around his neck./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0696086d4744bfb80ebe02f20f93fffc" Joshua approached cautiously. He didn't want to scare Will or make him take a heart attack. He seemed so fragile at that moment that he really feared to see him break in front of his eyes./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9212604cb9b4a259d231801598ee5df7"" Hey ... you're Will, right? Will Byers ... is everything all right?" He asked uncertainly, watching him with a frown./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7c4695d9fa0f901eff3e78c0472cfd9" Will jumped as if he

had just woken up from a nightmare, when he turned around he had dilated pupils. Arriving at Hawkins from Chicago late in the evening, Joshua's father had to brake suddenly because of a deer that had crossed their path. The animal had stopped there, in the middle, completely terrified, watching the headlights with its huge brown eyes unable to move in fear. Will Byers reminded him of that deer./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="45b1eac6f4378c022a6cde1998c40409" It took a few moments for Byers to recover, his gray cheeks tinged with pale pink for being caught in a moment of style="box-sizing: border-box;" / Will tried to hide the paper by crumpling it in his fist, but Joshua had already seen it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="b3a9b8bee93f1fe870ee817c0a1a3639" "Yes ... yes, I'm fine ..." Will mumbled, glancing at him strangely. Maybe even bored. There were not many people who spoke to him after the incident./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="594c3fc227fab962a50888d6d9b16859" Joshua leaned against the lockers, sighing and wondering in what situation he had hunted himself. But now he was in the race, so he might as well participate "Can I see?" Joshua asked, pointing with the chin to Will's hand./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="82530560df3672f239bb23899efa1414" Byers stepped back, looking away./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f8527eab628e207e249c0cb4b3cbce7f" "You don't have to worry about me" Joshua reassured him, pointing at himself with the thumb "I'm Joshua Foster, the freak number two of this school" he snorted, lifting a corner of his mouth in a grimace./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="636e3463bbb3c2c56eccfa72389978df""Sounds like a race you better not be the winner," Will admitted, sketching a smile./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="cf3d55e74fa4c1514dc8da671ce1db41"Joshua bowed his head, studying him./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8af9c167ec04ac70343123ced731863c"Will didn't seem to have taken it for a joke of dubious taste, he seemed almost relieved although he kept fiddling with that bit of newspaper held tight in his fist./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c8ca2da3b0929ead4e64dfd1553f1e65""I prefer to be number 1 freak that any other decerebrate in here" exclaimed Joshua settling his backpack on his shoulder./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c02bd13a1272f1d0383dd31b266f0d04"Will's smile widened, albeit slightly./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="08696f8efe0dab74a5ddd816a6bb9606""So, can I see or not?" Joshua insisted, holding out an open hand to Byers, he seemed to evaluate the thing "Come on, I have to spy on the competition" he teased him with a little grunt. /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7129fdcc5aad1a738a5e1271463e85"Finally, Will gave up. He reached for Joshua and dropped the offending piece of paper

on his palm./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="db2e375242e6dba4f82a7b17e4541a69"Joshua opened it calmly, looking at it carefully./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="145afec1395d66e96dd0123cb99f43f8"It was the article written by his father about the disappearance and reappearance of Will in Hawkins with his photo, whose eyes had been erased with a red biro, placed next to the paragraph with his incredible and mysterious story. With the addition of a blue felt-tip pen, there was an inscription: ZOMBIE BOY./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f57df00b296ca48bd4e53092db1bfec3"Joshua laughed and Will watched at him in alarm./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2f9e93deb added4f848619f3b8d2f5dab7""They are not even original" Joshua complained, tearing the item in two and making it fall at his feet./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="02a9ba626a172d12e01bf42394f908a8"Will followed the two pieces of paper slowly sliding to his feet. His voice turned out to be little more than a whisper "But I am ..."/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f39ac514136aa64f1bf37fccefef2209"Joshua's eyes darted over him and his laughter froze on his lips, he returned serious as he laid a hand on Will's shoulder "Don't give them that power" he exclaimed shaking him until Byers's attention was back on him "did you understand? Don't let them make you feel wrong. If they see that



they can hurt you, you will never get rid of them. Want to give you a name? Good. Use it. But don't let them use it against you"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8e8edbcebcdf71a1d16c7805b7017eed"Will stared at him and Joshua didn't look away. He didn't remember the last time he had held eye contact with someone, excluding his family, for so much time./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1ba8061d6d2045898b7f8f449b2b05de"He was so used to looking away from others that he no longer remembered what it meant to stare a person in the eye. He could almost feel Will's specter of emotions through his nutty style="box-sizing: border-box;" /The shadow of fear, the fragility of insecurity, the dull light of hope in believing that it is not some kind of freak show for the whole world./

P  
p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="08f7ed1655dbe495fca0ff201d1ef3fa"The bell rang and Joshua drew back, sketching a smile "Well, see you soon Zombie Boy" he winked at him as he walked away "next time I'll make sure I find a cool nickname too"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e431b8faa77f71273e0e69ec8c9c92c9"Joshua could feel Will Byers's eyes digging behind his neck as he adjusted his headphone again, trying to isolate himself from the rest of the world, trying to ignore the sense of well-being that had begun to flicker in his stomach after that good deed./p

## 7. 06 THE POLICE STATION

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d428ecce543c0e2903da3b20f23fe4a2"span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"S/spanspan style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"AMANTHA HAD/span never been so happy to go to work./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="6eefe0426e1045d1d03b228343dc1713"She still hadn't been able to talk to Alex, he had avoided her all morning, and it was starting to make her nervous. She could have dropped that stupid argument about the counter, especially after seeing what kind of asshole Billy Hargrove was, but his boyfriend's reaction was beginning to be tragically embarrassing. In the end, Sam hadn't done anything wrong but fight for what was hers. If Alex wanted to blame someone, that was Hargrove./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7d9a3ba4dc0144afe5bdcbe611d2fd83"At the mere thought, Sam's cheeks caught fire and she almost broke the lock on the bike chain for the vehemence with which she closed it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="97d13332584ea26916be1c28334bee44"If that Californian windbag had simply done what anyone else would have done, or apologize and leave her its damn place, none of this would have happened: she wouldn't have fought with Alex, she wouldn't have to defend herself against Tina's digs at the mess hall, and she would not have received cryptic warnings from nervous schoolgirls who liked the mystery a little too much./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="97d13332584ea26916be1c28334bee44"If that Californian windbag had simply done what anyone else would have done, or apologize and leave her its damn place, none of this would have happened: she wouldn't have fought with Alex, she wouldn't have to defend herself against Tina's digs at the mess hall, and she would not have received cryptic warnings from nervous schoolgirls who liked the mystery a little too much./p

data-p-id="1e50d0a8bbf08221fdd872f1f97341c1""That asshole..." she cursed between her teeth, opening the door of the police style="box-sizing: border-box;" /There was always the same smell to welcome her: coffee grounds burned mainly and the slight hint of ink on paper. There was also a hint of cigarette smoke, which Sam knew well, and that could only mean one thing. Hopper was in the office./

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e7b548085ec460cb3784cbd1877de8f3""Hey Sam," Callahan greeted her from the desk as she stepped inside the style="box-sizing: border-box;" /The common room was stuffy, documents, desks, and people were crammed inside the room stuck like Tetris tiles. But after all, it was a welcoming place, not like the cold police stations in Chicago./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="75593727d632c591e7c3201bb36864fd"There was not much to do give the virtually absent criminal activity in Hawkins; most of the days in there she spent them receiving phone calls, tidying up the reports in the boxes or playing cards with the policemen not involved in patrols on less busy style="box-sizing: border-box;" /It was a quiet job that allowed her to put a few dollars to take away some whim and put something aside once her studies were over./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="181cdb7b452d0ab9aaff25dc02312a89""Hey, Cal, another day of hard work I see" Samantha teased him, nodding at the donuts pack now practically empty beside the officer./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="ac75a86001a686a7be934f2593d228e8"Powell stepped forward, leaning against his colleague's desk, grabbed a donut and shaking it under Sam's nose, spreading frosting on the floor with a serious air "We deserved this, we walked a whole three hectares this

morning in that pumpkin patch" he took a bite to the sweet, before pointing with the fingers still covered of sugar the sole of the shoes "I have this stuff attached everywhere" Powell raised his eyebrows, looking at her seriously "and when I say everywhere, I really mean

Sam looked down in the direction Powell indicated and couldn't hide her disgust. Around the sole of the orderly boots of the policeman was attached what seemed to be mold, or at least, it shared the style="box-sizing: border-box;" /The texture seemed sticky and flabby, but Sam didn't want touching it to prove it, and the smell was acrid, pungent like something style="box-sizing: border-box;" /She had to hold her nose between her thumb and forefinger to get closer and examine the substance style="box-sizing: border-box;" /It gave a nauseating smell and her eyes almost watered./p

Once, when they were much younger, during a field trip with his family, Sam and Joshua found a decaying dead animal that had begun to prick with a twig. That thing under Powell's boots smelled even worse./p

"What fresh hell is that?" She asked, moving away from the source of the odor./p

Callaway shrugged "A feud between farmers ... someone poisoned old Merryll's pumpkin field"/p

Sam raised her

eyebrows "Can a pumpkin send that smell ?!"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1c39161be5e23db169c65f0b3450935a"Powell sank his teeth into the donut and when he spoke, he still had the crumbs in his mustache "Evidently yes, go figure out what pesticide threw us on"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="39ca20e9eb094edfa3d7a2c598dd3fb3"Sam grimaced, sliding her backpack from the shoulder to place it under Florence's now-empty desk. She didn't believe that Hawkins could become even more boring than it already was and instead, here she is, talking about spitements among peasants over who poisoned whose style="box-sizing: border-box;" /She could almost hear the scornful laughter from the rest of Chicago's inhabitants./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3dfabe047724e544fd0db2c466026b8f""What amazes me is that Flo hasn't burned those boots yet" Sam added, incredulous./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0502a77a56e19da320193da22e92247f"Powell's expression clouded over as he wiped his hands on his shirt "She had to leave early today," he merely said, clearing his throat before returning to the desk./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0e43e8bdbddcde4ff16bc8d7910be3b4"Sam cast a questioning glance at Callaway who mimed the word 'husband' under his mustache, and she just nodded, biting her lower style="box-sizing: border-box;" /She knew she had been hired because the now historic secretary, Florence, needed to reduce her working shifts and at first she thought it was for the old age, but then she discovered that her husband had become ill and the old woman was the only

person remained to look after him./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fa0239fa4d0734cf0befc9bfd8fa4c59""She left you some stuff to fix," the officer warned, pointing to the pile of documents on the corner of the desk./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f657a558c6727e006114f998267f6b7a"Sam took a seat behind the table and started flipping through the files stored on her right. "Thanks, Cal" she smiled at him before going back to work./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9835512f349b809f769119f0dad630fe"It was only a few months that she worked there and yet everyone treated her like a daughter, probably because most of them had children waiting for them at home, some perhaps, even of his age. That familiarity had been a pleasant style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Living in a small town isolated from the rest of the world could be a real drag, but in the end, it also had its positive things. She lifted a corner of her mouth, settling herself better in the chair. If it hadn't been for some extremely bigoted elements with reduced visions, many of Hawkins' inhabitants weren't bad beyond the prejudiced idea of country bumpkins that could be had of them at first glance. Most were good people, a little naive perhaps, and some not too smart, but some kind of good-natured people like Callaway and Powell./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d4712d8e07559b88e5b8038531025b54"Sam had barely finished checking the first file when the office door behind her slammed against the doorway making her jump. With her elbow, she hit the pile of papers diligently arranged by Florence for her that morning, and they fell to the ground./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d4712d8e07559b88e5b8038531025b54"Sam had barely finished checking the first file when the office door behind her slammed against the doorway making her jump. With her elbow, she hit the pile of papers diligently arranged by Florence for her that morning, and they fell to the ground./p

data-p-id="a617e6cd2673452419d36fcd48e81463"Sam raised her eyes to the sky, cursing between her teeth, before cradling to pick them style="box-sizing: border-box;"/It was already the second time that day that she found herself having to pick up things from the ground, she hoped that this would not become a habit./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="77ba9ea72f7cd7103b206ed24bf1c190""That's enough Murray, I tell you this morning: leave it alone or you will end up being taken for a fool" if Sam had not recognized the deep and hoarse voice of Chief Hopper, she could have felt his presence from the cloud of cigarette smoke left on his way while pushing a man to the door of whom Sam did not recognize the name "I am tired and smell of pumpkin piss, I would like to go home and take a shower and you should do it too"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1c7e04900d22e77a248fa92071198aeb"From under the desk, she could only see their legs, the man who answered to Murray's name was trying in every way to plant his shiny shoes — but extremely worn — on the floor of the police station, trying to resist. To judge by the ease with which Hopper's boots advanced towards the door, it was no big challenge for him. Even on the sole of his shoes, there was the same moldy substance that Powell had shown to Sam earlier./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="144fe68eb178b9ffeb4908fea2b3ae9d""Hopper you don't understand! The Russians are here! I tell you they have connections to Hawkins!" The man's voice echoed throughout the office rang and rang between the walls with a certain urgency and a note of desperation, and suddenly a strange silence fell in the police station. Even the telephones stopped ringing, someone from the closer desks barely stifled a laugh./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="144fe68eb178b9ffeb4908fea2b3ae9d"

data-p-id="5ce9e51fd5f0d31535c282241007d980"Sam craned her neck over the edge of the desk, spying on the two men just before they reached the door. Hopper was clutching a cigarette that was almost completely worn out between his lips, while with one hand he invited, not very elegantly, another man to come out. Murray looked skinny and weak, compared to the sheriff, despite the belly's curve under his shirt, it was no wonder Hopper hadn't shed even a drop of sweat when he threw him out, grabbing him by his dark blue trench. On the other hand Murray compensated in tenacity where he could not reach physically, his glasses had slipped up to the tip of his nose in the heat, wriggling like an eel to free himself from the sheriff's grip "Hopper you must listen to me!" He begged again, turning to face the chief./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1d7f3fc88244542d3a9b9e50144f6e17"Hopper froze, crossing his arms over his chest "Well, then I'll repeat it again: do you have any proofs?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f4fc3caa3615120c65078a304c528589"Murray settled his glasses on the bridge of his nose, opening and closing his mouth a couple of times, carefully choosing the words "Not yet, but soon—" he could not finish the sentence that Hopper started pushing again./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3a2d3ea7f823f18a7256a969c10ef572""I'm not one of your conspiracy magazines, Murray. I'm a cop, I need facts, not ridiculous theories," he interrupted in a peremptory tone, it seemed not to be the first time they faced that kind of talk./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9b63aa44e496ae92999b2e79f1ede125"But Murray didn't seem willing to drop the ball "You don't understand them—" Murray's voice suddenly faded when his eyes dropped over the sheriff's shoulder, right up to Sam's desk./p



p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="56659d1cea603bec15216fcc0b236917"The girl stopped for a moment, sure that this strange man was staring at her. His expression changed, there was a moment of confused surprise before his mouth opened and his eyebrows furrowed as if he were seeing an old friend./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1a195324eeb8008176a5166a0c8e7cc0"Murray was now over the threshold after every resistance attempt was suddenly sedated after he saw Sam and the girl shivered down her arms. For a moment she feared to see him run in her direction, babbling other senseless things or looking for some ally in her. Sam leaned a little lower under the desk, looking for shelter./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7390592d0f93ad09a1dc7d14a3ae8273"All she needed was a freak to crown that day./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a0f0a3071a422c1ae63a52a24bad93ca"But before the man could add or do anything, Hopper slammed the door in his face, raising a hand "Good afternoon to you too, Murray" he greeted him without bothering to hide the style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Sam was still hiding under the wooden surface when he heard the sheriff sigh and return to his office "Well, don't you have work to do? What does The State pay you for?" He asked, spreading his arms towards the rest of the office, still standing and giggling for the scene./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="82b7c35ec949f325b988ed621ba053af""We could give him a loyalty card or hire him," Callaway stepped forward, giggling as he brought the coffee cup to his lips, "He is more here than at his house"./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="edb492f620534dda6c16935ed07ceccb"Hopper beckoned him to give up, shaking his head "He has too much free time..." he muttered before suddenly stopping in front of Sam, looking at what little he could see of her figure, still crouching behind Flo's desk "And what are you doing down there?" he asked, throwing the cigarette out of the trash./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c2b3c00d7e042e701b592df0b36c4182"Sam narrowed her eyelids "You shouldn't smoke in the office" she pointed out, returning to collect the rest of the documents scattered on the ground./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9dc9967ea93791cf0a80d2860e9e23a0"Hopper raised his eyes to the sky "Oh God, did Florence tell you?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="dae8740d964c2df455d8645f505ab1ec"Sam nodded, sighing the reports on the desk with a sigh./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="46d0746cd3d3f30a0d82c4b2e68374d9"The chief stared at her, frowning, waved his forefinger "Coming from you, you smoke too, young lady"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="48bf322793850288d56ad12e147b488b"Sam shrugged, not caring, going back to sit "Yes, but no one is paid to check me" she pointed out starting to fiddle with a pen between the fingers, pretending to be back to read the documents in front of her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size:

18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e80be3c32632253d3b833786845908b1" The sheriff frowned, leaning with his fists on the desk "You are paid to do the answering, not to control me"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a943c4dfe44c7b7d08ee49517fde18d1" Sam smiled, looking up. "It was a small note added by Flo: babysitting the sheriff" and she couldn't hold back a laugh when she saw Hopper's expression harden./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="16fba94ccc48dc7f640e75e73f4e91d7" "Well," the sheriff stated "You're fired" he walked away going back to his office muttering something like 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;" Kids these days, no control/em' and 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;" see if a little girl has to tell me what to do as if that wasn't enough home/em' but Sam remained in her place./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3665ea86dd211da13b713fa0d5edccfa" "You can't fire me, you're not the one who hired me" she shouted after him, raising an eyebrow without even bothering to turn around. The only answer she got was the door to Hopper's office slamming behind him and what looked like some sort of annoyed low growl./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="beb8e19cb07d8f4cab19c96cb81e1502" Sam shook her head, unable to suppress a smile. By now even that had become the usual routine./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="463ee435ce2a029a48564f06ce46a882" She resumed setting up her desk, trying to rearrange the files she had now spread

without any logical order in front of her, most of which were balances for parking fees expired or some report to unknown persons for some little boy who had exaggerated with eggs and toilet paper under Halloween./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a414f27ee465994e3d02aa3b68662a09" She had almost finished when she saw a word, written in pen, out of the corner of a file. A name that, unfortunately, she recognized: Hargrove./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="b369d84fe89cc64e11bbf7b855d26db9" She glanced at the office, no one seemed to pay attention to her, so pretending to be filing the papers she was holding placed them in front of the folder she was interested in and, demanding indifference despite her hands tingling with curiosity, she approached the document to the edge of the desk and began to read it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d2951dae0037b0ec8234af9dc64cd93d" It was, however, with some disappointment that she discovered that it was a file dedicated not to Billy but a certain Neil Hargrove. Hawkins was a small town and there weren't many other families with that surname, and judging by the age, Neil had to be Billy's father./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4a3823c134c3e03e43995ca3981030a8" The papers appeared to have come from a California police station. Sam glanced again in front of her, Powell and Callaway, who had the desks closest to hers, were busy discussing the costumes of their children./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="19ce10a29992fc36a880b03a3e9d881d" She started to read the information carefully. There was a report for D.U.I. and two complaints about nocturnal shouting./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="78327be90a89e0ab603cd46f342dfb7e" She leaned more on the sheets, eager for curiosity./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="bf0be65dbd92f11ba544973f4e8052bb" A series of blows to the window behind her made her jump, forcing Samantha to close the file in surprise. When she turned around, she found herself facing the sheriff's scowl that silently scanned her through the glass. Hopper still had the hand with which he had knocked on the raised window clenched in a fist "When you're done with other people's business I'd like you to bring me a coffee" he scolded her, screaming to be heard over the glass./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="365f0ae57e6a3ceb9f9d4e176b93d52d" Sam still has red cheeks as she put the file back in her place with the others and got up for making some more coffee./p

## 8. 07 BLEEPs-BLOOPS

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9589f0cfe56f7ae75254b951566a4828"span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!"/span exclaimed Maria, her mouth still half-open in disbelief as she claps her hands on the counter to give more emphasis to her words. Her hazel eyes sparkled at the idea of a new juicy gossip./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a69c4d14c3fb153bfd3c82322f243761"The girl's voice, despite not being the least bit worried about being discreet, was barely audible over the loud bomb blasts and gunfire belching out the nearby shoot-em-up style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Sam settled back on the stool she was sitting on, the red leather of the seat clinging to her jeans. Probably someone had spilled some unidentified liquid and had not been cleaned well. She looked down resignedly, feeling the fingers sticky for sugar and rubber when she laid them back on the snack bar./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1cdd77846e1cdf5bdf3edc3829b69447"The Arcade Palace was dark and most of the light came from the yellow and blue neon that ran along the walls. From time to time, some screens of the machines behind Sam flashed to signal a new record or a disastrous defeat. Every faint beam of light was accompanied by the whipped groans of some little boy and the jingling of coins as they rummaged in their pockets./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7b1604e37b158359472c828c63938e68"It was not long since Sam was there, but she already had a headache./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica,

Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="6fcd86578f802787092f448352b7016f" She admired how Maria managed to stay there whole afternoons without going completely mad. /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9fec99af7971667e348124701e770f35" The air was stale, hot and still, filled with the smell of sweat and old upholstery. A true hell of neon lights. /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c21c98d0434271d3bbba9e381f5695a3" Maria, instead, was unperturbed. And even wearing that ridiculous blue T-shirt, of a larger size with the Arcade logo printed above, she looked proud and confident. /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9988d480798df2b5e62dab24029611ce" Sam listlessly pulled a gulp from the milkshake straw she held in her hands, nodding with a frown "But I couldn't read much more, Hopper caught me," she admitted, playing with the little red plastic tube between her fingers. When she ran her tongue over her nude lips, her mouth was still numb for the cold drink and her papillae tingle for the mix of chocolate, milk, and sugar. /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="23fc213d11a20ef1def9b7135cc4a792" "Sam, do you have any other quarter?" asked Joshua suddenly appearing beside his sister. His fingers tapped impatiently on the counter, betraying a certain urgency despite his voice being flat and disinterested, as usual. /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="60b6083032981842bb3cbf0df28ca6a3" Sam snorted, slamming the now almost completely empty container of the drink on

the arcade counter "I gave you almost five dollars! How did you spend it all already?" She scolded him, turning abruptly towards her brother./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fd70062207a6cc348ebe865dea20721c"Joshua looked up at the sky, sliding his shoulders with a sneer "What I have to say? obviously I suck and I always lose" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="90b8ee4c25a4d1d7b090b5d2cd4e838c"Sam stared at him tightening her eyelids but Joshua didn't seem to be touched by that silent reproach./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="39249876b41c2028e7a8c4a83a18f44b"Maria leaned sideways, drawing a handful of coins from an almost half-empty jar on whose glass was affixed a label bearing the words 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;"Keith's tips/em' "Hey buddy, take it, on the house" she tossed him the coins making a wink./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8b6cb63d70dad3c37b07757f589a4be8"Joshua's pout turned into a grimace that remembered a satisfied smile when he left with his little booty, scattering a few coins on the floor on his way to one of the style="box-sizing: border-box;" /"Hey!" His sister called him, pushing back from the counter to lean where the thirteen-year-old had disappeared "What do you say?!" but Sam screams were drowned out by the 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;"bleeps/em' of a machine behind her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3c63fba32f7d530db8ae4bccebc043d2"Maria laughed "Don't worry. I adore your brother and I can't stand Keith anymore, " she admitted frowning and suddenly lowering her voice as if it were



a secret when in the end, it was not at style="box-sizing: border-box;" /br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Sam laughed, waving Keith's tips jar, now completely empty "Not that he deserved them anyway," the brunette remarked as she set the container back on the counter. The last two dollars rang out inside. Sam stared at Maria, with the ghost of a smile painted on her lips "last time Keith spent the whole turn trying to set a new record at em style="box-sizing: border-box;"Gyruss/em, then after an hour a little boy came and beat him ... he had to start over again"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c1ba4ffe662ad2559603e920bf6cf134"Maria raised her eyebrows, not surprised at all "And I must stoop to take orders from a similar subject" she complained, placing an elbow on the counter "So?" she pressed, addressed to Sam, studying her from under the tight dark curls that fell on her forehead, her eyes reduced to cracks and a grin on the face "couldn't you read anything else about our Californian Adonis?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e9409aaeca497d759f19564058ed168b"Sam folded her arms on the glossy, sticky surface of the bar, shrugging her shoulders. "I told you, Hopper caught me," she snorted, returning to play with the transparent plastic cap of the milkshake "and then it wasn't on him, but on his father "/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="22d4856d962bad4a7bb842b0a59d5018"Maria came back straight, stared at her seriously, placing a hand on her hip "The apple does not fall far from the tree"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f348991d8f1790d94ff21f7c2bc2cf44""They were just a couple of complaints about night noises, maybe he just messed up a few nights and neighbors freaked out," Sam defuse, bowing her head "and in any case, this thing remains between you and me, if

something like this were discovered surely someone would enjoy embroidering in details of an absurd story ..." she fixed her friend seriously, launching that recommendation heartily, before looking away "that girl... Joanna... with those strange warnings was enough for driving me nuts... not that I worry about the reputation of Billy Hargrove, but I would hate having a similar name after not even half a day at a new school"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="6d424537e425d8ad56c0399040ea9016"Maria made a face, looking away./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="57dd52528c3e64afccaf7bf2a3d1a166"Sam froze, the straw still raised between her fingers, stared at her friend, now deadly serious "What?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2c28ec01b6032b3fe637bcda49f484eb"Maria raised her eyebrows, now completely absorbed in staring at a spot on the counter that she began to scrape off with her thumbnail "Nah ... no big deal..."/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7840a203d256604124c5c0df76f78a34""Maria Sinclair" Sam called her peremptory hitting the counter with the hand "What do you know that I don't?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="6e9dbab5747ced911faf5fb4dc97ec7e""Ok, ok" Maria finally gave up, puffing and finally drop on the stain "I found out who that girl is, she is the daughter of Vice President Griffin" she warned, bowing her head./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica,

Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="aac7bd3b51a61ced9619b777ae47bfdd"Sam raised an eyebrow "So what?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="dbe928ca8808eb49863b2d8334be01fb"Maria stared at her as if she could not believe that Sam didn't get it "then surely she knows something that we mere mortals cannot know! There's probably something in his school file!"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9434bc52f279fb7e7f3748db488f0ee1"Sam let her arms fall to her sides "More tittle-tattle? Do you know that someone today assumed he had moved here because he stabbed someone in California, didn't you?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3c4ca4c55840afab7be0bcc5a6ab9c8c"Maria's expression became marble "You are more stubborn than a damned mule, girl" she grabbed a rag near the cash desk and started to dust the objects on the counter "anyway it amazes me that you are defending him" Maria observed staring at Sam looking for any reaction in the friend./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="5e8824f9cc2c24330eff5371929d7ac7"Sam calmly finished the last sip of the milkshake, without letting her friend's words touch her in the least. She put down the glass, now empty, and stared at her "Don't get me wrong, they can say what they want about that Hargrove prick" Sam remarked, crossing her legs and settling herself better on the stool "I simply don't want to be one of those fools who believe everything they're told"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8040c439df0988e701611563c4df184c"Maria lifted a

corner of her mouth "Ooooh, yes, now it makes sense ..." Sinclair agreed sarcastically. In response, Sam threw to her friend a piece of not completely loose ice remained attached to the plastic of the drink./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="049f1c66d15bde3290d6e32413a1bcae""Well, then you don't deserve to see my costume for Tina's party," Sam threatened her friend, turning the stool over to give her back./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d95355e6fa322aee1c85d4808c41b1d7"Maria's curiosity lit up like a match launched in gasoline "What ?! Did you do it?" she asked, leaning over the counter./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="ecaf6c58a5b10838ce784e380e8fb8b7"Sam stared over her shoulder, giving Maria a cheeky smile "Did you doubt it?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4000bf25bc1494568c7b1fb427c62988"The Sinclair hopped on the spot, hightailing Sam "Of you? Never" the girl moved her chin to the envelope at Sam's feet "now come on, show me the goods"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="ffe4600d5384faeed6920affa3b199b1""Only if you offer me a drink first" replied Sam biting her lower lip, barely holding back a laugh as she bent over to pick up the contents and spread the dress on the counter "I ran to the store before it closed... it was a tragedy to find something decent of my size"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c1b4e536cf77383226dbd78f169de194"Maria lifted the

skimpy blue jumpsuit with a fluttering red skirt at the end "Uh ... Supergirl, right?" she asked, pointing to the red and yellow 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;"S /em' on the front of the dress before smiling "The Steel Girl!" Maria exclaimed before winking to Sam "I know what you'll make come steel with this thing ..."br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /br style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Sam pretended to be offended by the remark, snatching her dress from Maria's hand and putting it safely in the bag "You're the worst!" Sam yelled looking around "there are children!" she whispered in shock, before bursting out laughing with the other girl./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="66f58feac7e067b57c642e43136c497c"Maria shrugged her shoulders, not at all worried "Why? Are we still in the watershed?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a51441742c9f8bc85d8f42fb7351701e"The laughter on Sam's lips suddenly spreads, her eyes widening in alarm before running to the thin watch on her wrist "Oh no! It's late" she grabbed the bag and the backpack on the ground, striding towards the first row of machines "thanks for the chat but I have to catch Josh and run home!" Sam exclaimed to be heard above the herd of screaming kids behind her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="42c2b60953ebe8091957b3ec1916bb8d""Hey Sam, I think you're going the wrong way," Maria called out to her, raising herself on her toes to be seen over the children's head. The Sinclair pointed out the Arcade window./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="03daee19612eb8b1a9bdcee9b0cfe4fe"Sam's gaze follows her friend's finger, confused, and almost found it hard to believe her style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Sam approached the counter again, craning her neck and narrowing her eyelids to get a better look at the

parking lot "Is that Josh?" she asked incredulously./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4bfaf39dcc5091c44c9193540dae37f6"Yet, though she found it hard to believe, she recognized the green plaid shirt and the t-shirt of some stupid superhero that his brother had decided to wear that morning. Joshua was the kid who was struggling in every way to stand on a skateboard in the parking style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="594bc488e564c8b2604adf7e9c886523"Didn't look like a familiar face to Sam. Not that she paid much attention to younger kids, considering that Joshua never brought any friends home or ever mentioned any names all the time they lived in Hawkins. Let alone some girls. And besides, pretty nice stood still watching the scene with parted lips and a frowning forehead as if trying to solve some strange puzzle./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="594bc488e564c8b2604adf7e9c886523"Didn't look like a familiar face to Sam. Not that she paid much attention to younger kids, considering that Joshua never brought any friends home or ever mentioned any names all the time they lived in Hawkins. Let alone some girls. And besides, pretty nice stood still watching the scene with parted lips and a frowning forehead as if trying to solve some strange puzzle./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0b61b0ccd070b5c76209670b15544045"Maria nodded, staring at the Arcade parking lot "It would seem so"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="935baa47378aa27cf13d2ce0ef18b741""And is he with a girl?" Sam still had her mouth half-open "A real girl? Not drawn in some comic book...?" /p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0203b705e2b4b1b78351892397dd15bd""Yep" confirmed Maria./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="df8841e80b4894c84c51557c2837ea37""And he's having fun... outside? In the open air?" Sam continued to ask, stunned./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f3c8bc3111245ed6154fcf2890a18bd7""Maria turned to stare at her, one eyebrow raised "Didn't you were in a hurry?" she pointed out, leaning against the counter./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="3eb202823488602de461713100ba1d7a"Sam shook herself "Yeah! See you sweetheart" she greeted, giving her friend a kiss./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="1998e4a07d0109d2d8bf47e05347b6d6""Always happy to welcome you into this doomed shelter!" Maria shouted after her, shaking the head, before realizing that some of the older boys were making ugly's face at her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="50c8c7097345a5b7e20d9fbe43412b33""Maria spread her arms "Well? What are you looking at? No sane person would spend the whole afternoon here!" she complained until they decided to return to their video games "Nerds ..." she grumbled under her breath, grabbing a pack of marshmallows from Keith's secret stash, hidden under the counter. She bites one of the candy, returning to look at the Arcade with a snort./p

## 9. 08 DEJA VU

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2570572c434010e9e32fed0d14b7208a"span style="box-sizing: border-box; font-weight: bold;"WHEN SAM CAME OUT/span, the parking lamps were already on and their light reflected on the bodywork of the parked cars. Goosebumps were on Sam's arms from the evening chill./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="be39b6ee13eed7575460a61ae4e69377"Above the curves of the hills that surrounded the city, the sky had painted itself crimson and the hills burned above the trees in the evening dusk. Their profile now looking almost black, silhouetted, colors muted, as if they had been drained away. The laughter of Joshua and that of the girl echoed through the open space, carried by the mild October breeze more fizzy by nightfall./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f1c2ed87c1f315e78f2abcf4f3edee96"The wind tousled Sam's hair and pinked her cheeks. It gave life to the long grass at the side of the road, still yellowing from the high August sun. The sign of the Arcade Palace revolved placidly over their heads, lengthening shadows on the cars./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9135320fa8abaa439cf5a3e929c20643""You're terrible" the redhead teased from above the sidewalk, continuing to watch the boy skateboarding back and forth across the street "even without a leg I could do better than you"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="ab09a20fd74574b0e5c038766cca805c"Joshua waved his



arms, trying to regain his balance when a table wheel hit pebbles on the asphalt "Stop it, it's hard enough already," he complained, giving himself another push with his foot./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="300053a5af41dbf28077030ee3c40d92"The little girl snorted, continuing to make fun of him before stopping, noticing Sam's style="box-sizing: border-box;" /"Hi," the Foster girl greeted, looking away from her brother "I don't know how you did it but looks like he's having fun" she congratulated turning to her "I'm Sam, the sister of that disaster there" Sam introduced herself with a smile./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7ca776dd590e895a8e10e84260c2a438"The 13-year-old girl stared at her for a moment and all traces of bravado shown shortly before had suddenly disappeared. She bit her lip looking down at the ground awkwardly "Max" the redhead replied quickly, toying with the edge of the sleeve of her sweatshirt./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fb4e30a328121b4eccf1d758ee51c7b2"Sam gave her one last look from head to toe, before giving her a smile, turning her attention back to his brother "Hey, you can do something else as well as read comics and mold on the couch" she makes fun of him./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d7157a0ec69aaad8eed2ed9147ed9b5a"Joshua passed in front of the two, giving Sam the middle finger./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9a391e90fde3db6ae11bbbfec1773c58"Max chuckled, looking at them as the two siblings teased each other, in the end, she seemed to convince herself that Sam wouldn't have bitten her because she approached the brunette girl and pointed to a corner of the parking lot "I built a small ramp but Joshua is too scared to try

it"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e3517940613702458b5c1f24f233e247" It was true. Not far away there was a sort of platform made out of an old wooden plank resting on the edge of a railing to give it the right style="box-sizing: border-box;" /A devilish grin painted on the faces of the two girls as they cast a meaningful glance at each other./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f5b5df7cc69bf4a5457430dcd9b652f2" Sam whirled towards his brother "Josh! Are you really afraid of such a small jump?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="70e80b4a3fa155773b092ab93f578692" Joshua shot a resentful look at the redhead, who shrugged in response with an innocent smile painted on her lips./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9524bae5ff7fdb11aad62ae9bc1d9350" The younger Foster stopped in front of his sister, picking up the skateboard from the ground "Why don't you do it then?" he asked, raising his chin and planting his feet firmly on the ground./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="b8fdb5c7dda8c9041ed95d395f8ed1df" Sam raised an eyebrow and stared first at the skate and then at his brother "Are you sure? Because if I do it and I succeed before you, this will make you deserving of the nickname 'em style="box-sizing: border-box;"chicken/em' for a whole month" she pointed out, lifting a corner of her mouth./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="b8fdb5c7dda8c9041ed95d395f8ed1df"

data-p-id="dc301bb0825eff88db854a2893872cf6"Max stifled a laugh against the sleeve of her sweatshirt, before miming the verse of a chicken "c-c-cowl!"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="9f61b34272a8bc8c5f92aff51033fe6b"Joshua's lips thinned, staring at them with narrowed eyes. Sam and Max exchanged glances, snickering, already savoring their victory. They had hurt his male pride./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="192653ac994a786bf63f31a4e4e986a8""Good," Joshua ruled finally, walking toward the ramp, the skate under his arm./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0984a0ce05f8e8baafe9544d804c85e0""It's not that high!" Max assured him./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d4402177042a0ae19baa0fc0c0639efa"Sam raised her hands and cupped them around the mouth, shouting "Come on Josh! You can do it" Sam continued to cheer encouragement as she watched him take up position a few feet away from the ramp./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8eac568af2959c36e3e9f162a9b821cc"Joshua dropped the skateboard to the ground, stopping it with one foot and stood still, staring at the obstacle in front of him. Judging by how he raised and lowered his chest he was out of breath. His hands kept opening and closing in a fist at his sides./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="afabdec356087827412acd147b203f94"From time to time Sam saw that Joshua was moving his lips, but she couldn't hear what

he was saying, he was probably silently ranting at her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="c8ab46d289c3ce297d30ab487b6b5c75" She certainly didn't want him to get hurt, it was her brother and - something particularly important - he was under her responsibility, but some self-esteem would certainly do him good. Joshua had always been a rather lonely child, but it had worsened in the last two years with the loss of their style="box-sizing: border-box;" /It was important that, from time to time, he remembered that he was still a boy and that he had all the time in the world to grow up./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d36128585bc06aa4adf800175097b5e4" Sam held her breath when, after endless minutes, Joshua finally decided to give himself the first push./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="8dd5cb1bc87afe3dd314dd2f3f7052b1" "Come on Josh! Faster! Faster," Sam call at him as soon as her voice came back. Her palms were sweaty as she watched him pick up speed and approach the wooden board. By now it was going too fast, even if he wanted to, Joshua could never have stopped unless he fell to the ground. It was the point of no return./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="83b7e51896fe40cfdcac59c437934954" Instinctively Sam grabbed Max's hand, squeezing it without even realizing it when her brother climbed into the air with the skateboard./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="f2c625ea290b7c14205a40533ede88bd" Time seemed to stop as Joshua cut through the air, bending his knees to prepare for landing. Sam could not look away as his lips moved in silent encouragement "You can do it, Josh, come on, you can do it"./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0dca27b84a66d840a5809a32f97a825c" After what seemed like an interminable moment, the wheels of the skate touched the asphalt again and her brother darted back toward them, unharmed, looking back in disbelief. Then his screams and laughter joined those of Sam and Max./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="01f1a62f0564780ff2f6af7de562936c" Her brother waved his fists in the air and almost lost his balance to celebrate his victory. Perhaps not wanting to further challenge his fortune or risk ruining that moment of jubilation, he stopped and decided to walk the last few meters that separated him from the two girls running./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4d740fbcfbe44af9a4a1f345198f72a0" "Did you see Sam?! Did you see ?!" Joshua was clutching Max's skateboard under his left arm, his knuckles were bleached by the force with which his fingers had tightened around the wood. Sam had never heard his voice cracked by that excitement, his brother almost stammered "H-how long has it been?! Five?! Seven Feet?!" Joshua was shaking as he screamed, glancing over his shoulder from time to time as if to believe that he had done it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d9323d874bf0dc14e9cbe903da7d042a" "You were great Josh! I knew you'd do it," Sam congratulated, ruffling his hair./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="14a26a0b265bfc449f3b149740223a87" Max approached, shrugging her shoulders "Not bad for a rookie" she granted him as she pushed away hair from her face behind her ears./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica,

Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="6daf32a692be0b82e38d3ce68878da43" Their choruses of joy were muffled by a rumble all too familiar for Sam. When she turned around she was blinded by the headlights of a blue Camaro, parked on the curb a little further back from them. How long had he been there to observe them?/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="35ce78a2bf24f1087943d9164a3cf47c" The car drove along the lane and the brakes just whistled when it stopped in front of them. Billy Hargrove's arm was leaning against the lowered window, the aviators were pinned to the neck of the white jersey and when the blond turned, his jaw was contracted./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="0967425f597f01da04cac1cc6dd12258" Blue eyes lingered for a moment on her, two heavy blue pools like the waters of the deepest oceans and Sam felt the air failing her. There was no sign of that morning's arrogant asshole, it was someone else./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="a959cae8b30bc455f39509aba16e40c2" He was lost./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="20ba681202669070f08b5d97c8131755" But the moment ended as it had arrived and when a malicious grin drew itself on his face, any trace of... well, whatever it was, had disappeared "Look who's there... where's your knight, princess?" Billy's tongue darted out from his lips moistening the lower lip "Do he knows that you go around all alone in the evening?" he chaffed, giggling at his mockery./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e6b477ebb805626fbcb908a5bcf7914" Sam twitched her jaw and instinctively pulled her chin up "I don't need anyone else

fight's my battles so fuck yourself, Hargrove"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2498dd6123cb4ed0316443fd6a6db5b6"A low laugh sounded from the depths of the Californian's throat, while Max continued to stare first one then the other, with frowning eyebrows "You ... do you know each other?"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="08d1bd4001bc365303029e5296e753ba"Sam didn't look away from him when she answered "Unfortunately, yes"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2cec917dc2741df41357a44ac4f4b169"Billy's eyes lingered on the girl next to Sam and all traces of jokes disappeared. The features of the Californian spread out in cold and annoyed indifference "You're late. I said at 6 pm," Billy reproved her, looking away from the redhead and staring at the road "climb on and make it quickly"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="121d0271faa0256a6cc37bda4185e2ba"Max paused, looking first at Sam and then at Joshua./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="2cbb6428efda97cf2cf1264fe63b2b2d"Josh handed her the skate. Max's eyes went down on the object, grabbing it urgently, before making a face at him. Then she turned around the car with a puff and opening the door./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="50cd5188f345c544fb1f23bc5ad4cad0"Sam furrowed her eyebrows, looking at Max, then Billy, and at the end, Max again "Are you ... his sister?" she asked her before the girl got on the Camaro./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="044f4328099abf2a76e55532207ebcfe"Stepsister" Billy corrected her dryly. At that word echoed the closed door on the passenger side. Max has gotten even smaller on that car./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="cb3777ee4e5638a90735d3f9297a9c59"Sam bent down to peer in the window, looked over Billy's chest, smiling at the redhead "Max was a pleasure to meet you"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fe22de8c3ad2d960a35cedf73e038ffc"The girl in the passenger seat lifted the corners of her lips, before returning to stare at her hands, resting on her knees./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="fc0427991e98a0a9eb55c895092d5a3f"The Foster girl then turned to the driver, he already had his hands on the wheel, ready to leave "Too bad I can't say the same about you"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e6cfd2f763f920ab74616dd85c02cb82"Billy chuckled, shaking his head without even looking at her./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="39c7040712be51c143f0f62d7a797c52""Come on Josh, we've lost enough time" Sam spurred his brother to move, but he didn't follow her right away. Joshua glanced at Billy one last time, who looked at him from below, raising his eyebrows./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e26755bc7a3c6ae7afce723012cdc206""What are you



staring at?" the blond challenged him with a grin./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="4bd6160b842cc5e80ef1b1eae3220fe3"Sam froze, turning around, not seeing her brother follow her "Josh! I said let's go!" she urgently recalled, fearing that the situation between him and Billy could escalate. She was ready to go back, standing between the two, but Joshua completely ignored Billy's comment and turned to Max instead./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="dcc78de5cc11ba31bf9f6130a5f9a470""Bye, MadMax" Joshua greeted his new friend with a wave of his hand, to which she replied with a small smile before Billy started the car./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="d254103c4da0231e401b887ecd2e4914"Sam reached out a hand, then laid it on her brother's shoulders, guiding him to their style="box-sizing: border-box;" /Billy pushed the accelerator behind them. The tires squealed on the asphalt, raising smoke and a burning smell./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e76921608bb0c0ad86313ae199cd7bb8"Sam feels the danger before saw it./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="e17da6e50ce2350994525f132c166216"She grabbed her brother by the collar of his shirt and pulled it along with her over the sidewalk, just before the blue Camaro passed a few inches from where they were walking a little earlier./p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="7f2717d13c1cdec56b05fec4a2f30328""Piece of shit!"

Sam's scream echoed through the parking lot as she let go of his brother and screamed at Billy, now out of the parking lot, and almost completely disappeared from view "WHAT IS THE FUCKING MATTER WITH YOU?! ASSHOLE!"/p

p style="box-sizing: border-box; margin: 0px 0px 24px; font-size: 18px; font-family: 'Source Sans Pro', 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; line-height: 24px; padding: 0px; color: #222222;" data-p-id="142683d09a90915fefdb88e0c153d299">Joshua was still motionless, with his eyes wide open and his heart pounding against the chest for the adrenaline. As he watched his sister rail like a fury against the wind he didn't know whether to be more afraid of her or Billy Hargrove./p

## 10. 09 THE CALL

**SAMANTHA SANK** the wooden spoon into the pot. Due to the strength with which she did it, the preparation inside it splashed on the hob.

"Stupid macaroni," the brunette grumbled between her teeth, stirring the cheese with a huff "and stupid Hargrove."

Just naming him made Sam nervous system go haywire. A strange blush spread all over her neck to the tips of the ears. She thanked that Joshua was in the living room with headphones on his ears, listening to music and that his father had not yet returned from work. At least they would not have witnessed such a pitiful spectacle.

Sam was still furious about what had happened to the arcade: she had almost thrown the garage lock into the street when she hadn't managed to close it, and the same fate had been up to the keys when they fell into the lane. And now, Sam had decided to vent the latent rage on those poor macs and cheese.

While the spoon sank into the pasty substance inside the pot, Sam could pretend to be raging on what had proved to be the leading cause of her problems that day.

"Screwed Hargrove," she continued to mutter, punctuating every word with a spoonful "You. Your Camaro. And your fucking malicious grin."

She could not understand how a person could be so irritating.

Sam was still busy, muttering a string of curses against Billy when the front door in the living room opened.

Samantha glanced at the wall clock in the kitchen, the cat-shaped clock next to the fridge, and noticing the time she returned to concentrating on dinner. It must surely be her father.

As usual, he had been late, but that evening more than usual. Sam looked up from the yellow sauce that grumbled in the pot whenever a bubble burst on its surface. She bent her head towards the living, listening. From the other room came a strange silence.

Generally, the arrival of Mr. Foster did not go unnoticed. For an

investigative journalist, Eric James Foster was a rather noisy person. His heavy footsteps punctuated his arrival on the carpet as he threw his coat and scarf on the sofa. He used to loudly announced to his children his arrival, apologizing for the delay, or pacing back and forth from the driveway after noticing that he had left his briefcase in the Ford.

Sam listened more closely. Only the rhythmic ticktock of the clock and the bass simmering from the pot rang between the kitchen walls. Then something changed: the door creaked closing with a muffled 'clack,' and another ticking joined the clock. More chaotic and messy. A patter.

A sigh added at that noise. *Something* was panting in the other room. And then the cry of his brother and a dull thud.

Before she realized it, Sam had already rushed to the living, armed with only a ladle, lifting it like a baseball bat.

"JOSH!" His sister called, slamming her shoulder on the corner of the door, but didn't stop. "Josh! Are you OK ?!" she shouted again, not getting a reply. She almost tripped over her steps. One of her slippers, in haste, remained in the kitchen.

Crossing the threshold of the room, Sam froze with half-open mouth and wide eyes in front of the scene.

His father was standing in front of the entrance, staring at Joshua. Her brother was lying on the floor with the headphones still on his head, intent on defending himself against a small beige fur ball, no bigger than a mailbox.

A dog.

A dog that was drooling her brother's face.

"Surprise!" began Mr. Foster, spreading his arms and smiling excitedly like a child in front of a basket of sweets.

Sam lowered the ladle, staring at his father with frowning eyebrows. "You did it," the girl said, looking down at the little ball of fur. "I'm glad to know that the only adult responsible in this house is me."

Joshua raised himself on his elbows, moving the dog away with one hand and taking off his headphones with the other "I hope that then we never need an adult, or we're all dead," he muttered, frowning, while the dog was still trying to jump at him to finish licking his face.

In response, Sam threw the spoon and hit his arm.

"AH!" Her brother massaged the affected part, turning to Samantha a shocked look, "very mature reaction, congratulations," the little Foster pointed out with a grunt.

The puppy, smelling the scent of food, ran to sniff the melted cheese that was pouring on the floor. Then the puppy started to lick it.

Eric Foster approached the children, bending over to pick up the dog. "Normal children would react by jumping with joy and shouting excitedly," he observed, placidly scratching the animal's ears.

The two teenagers turned to stare at their father, scowling.

Eric sighed, clearing his throat. "Never mind..." he muttered under his breath, chuckling. Then the expression of the head of the family frowned. He began to smell the air, looking around before turning his gaze to his oldest daughter, "Sam ... tell me that this smell of burnt is not our dinner," Mr. Foster begged her with a hopeful grimace, already knowing the answer.

The girl's green eyes widened in horror as she ran back to the kitchen, losing the other slipper.

Joshua, still sitting on the floor, stared stoically at the living room door, while from the kitchen came shouts of surprise and pans banging. "And that's two..." he murmured, remembering the quarrel of that morning.

The dog lifted his head and stared at Mr. Foster, still intent on scratching his ears. "Don't worry," the head of the family reassured him, looking at the kitchen. "I'll take care of your cans."

"Enjoy your ... meal ...?" asked Mr. Foster uncertainly, looking doubtfully at the dish in front of him and at what was left of that charred macaroni with cheese.

Sam sank his fork into the dough with her face darkened, saying nothing. Joshua instead continued to stare at his dinner as if it were a strange alien ready to eat him alive.

"Luckily, someone seems to like it," Eric noted, leaning under the table to check that the dog was still alive as he ate the less burnt parts of the macaroni from an arranged bowl.

Sam scowled his father, and Mr. Foster cleared his throat, straightening up on the chair. "Come on, Josh," he incited his younger son, making a sign with the head for him to grab his fork.

At the boy's pleading gaze, the man continued, "If it gets cold, it becomes inedible."

Joshua grunted, barely holding back a laugh, and Mr. Foster bit his lower lip, trying to stay sober.

Sam looked up from her plate, chewing her portion. "You're both rude," she retorted, looking from his father to his brother.

The other two continued to giggle until the sound of the wall telephone in the living room interrupted the family dinner.

Sam wiped her mouth with her napkin, trying to get up. Mr. Foster stopped her "I'll go," he reassured her, winking, and his daughter fiddled with her dinner again. By now, she was eating it just for pride.

"We should choose a name," Joshua pointed out, leaning under the table to give the puppy a piece of macaroni.

Sam nodded, putting on more macaroni "How about—"

In the other room, the phone stopped ringing, and Mr. Foster's voice rang in the house "Foster Family. Go ahead, caller, you're on the air—!" There was a pause, but then Eric's voice returned, more dangerous, "oh, Murray, is you."

The fork in Sam's hand stopped in midair. The elder daughter's attention was diverted entirely to the living, where her father's voice had now become lower, almost no longer audible.

Joshua stared at his sister, still enchanted staring into space, passed his hand in front of her eyes. "Sam?" he asked, studying her with frowning eyebrows.

Sam nodded absently, throwing one last look at the other room. "Yes, sorry, I was distracted for a moment ... were we?"

Sam turned absently over the pages of the magazine, lying on the bed, without really paying attention to what was written in. Her mind kept returning to the strange phone call received at dinner. After answering, Eric had apologized to her, saying he would have to continue that business call in his study and that he would have eaten later.

When Sam began to clear the table and wash the dishes, Mr. Foster had not yet returned, and his already unattractive mac and cheese had taken on the consistency of a block of marble. Sam had left his plate there, waiting for his return. But when she had decided to go up to her room followed by Barley — so they had decided to call the new arrival in the family — Sam had found the door to his father's office still closed. Only a thin luminous line leaked beneath it, signaling the presence of Mr. Foster inside the room.

She had even tried to eavesdrop, but she couldn't hear anything through the massive mahogany wood, if not the low and indistinct cadence of her father's voice. So she had let it go.

But Sam couldn't stand the coincidence. That afternoon Chief Hopper had chased a delirious madman named Murray out of the police station, and that same evening, a man with the same name called her father.

Sam nibbled thoughtfully at her thumbnail, enameled in red, ticking rhythmically with the fingers of her other hand on the mattress.

Perhaps that madman, having had no luck with the cops, was trying to sell that absurd story about Russian spies to his father. But if that were the case, Mr. Foster would have already liquidated him; as an investigative journalist of a certain depth, Eric Foster had learned to distinguish absurd or completely invented stories from those that could hide an interesting trace for his articles.

Her father also seemed to know that Murray ...

The train of thoughts that had hit her abruptly stopped at the sound of a whining whine. Sam leaned over the mattress and crossed the wide, watery, pleading puppy's eyes. Her dog was sitting on the carpet, wagging his tail.

"Do not even think about it. I won't let you get on the bed," Sam warned him.

The dog continued to look at her, barely moaning.

"No," Sam insisted, frowning under her fringe, trying to look angry and peremptory.

Barley tilted his head, slightly shaking his ears, in silent prayer. Sam snorted, rolling her eyes. The girl reached out and grabbed the puppy by the scruff of the neck and placed it on the covers.

Barley's tail began to move frantically on the mattress.

"Only this time," she conceded, staring at him thoughtfully and waving her forefinger at his nose. In response, the dog licked it, making the brunette laugh and causing her facade to collapse. She was about to turn off the light when another noise in the back of the room distracted her.

Someone was knocking on the window pane.

Sam stood up, heading for the source of the noise. But even before she pulled back the curtains, she already knew who would find behind them.

There was only one person who could look for her at that time of night, in precarious balance on the roof of the attic: Alex.

She opened the window, letting her boyfriend in.

Although he was used to physical activity, climbing a tree and up to her bedroom window was not an easy task, and Alex was still out of breath when he sneaked past the window frame.

He still wore the basketball team's jacket and clothes that morning. He had probably been training or running around with his friends all



afternoon.

That detail made Sam more annoyed than she already was. While her boyfriend got back on his feet, she turned around, crossing her arms over her chest and sitting on the bed.

But Alex didn't seem to be in the same hurry.

The brown eyes of the boy lingered on the puppy beside Sam, "And that little one?"

Sam raised an eyebrow, not even bothering to check what Alex was referring to. They hadn't talked to each other all day, and now that they could finally clear up that absurd situation, he kept putting it off.

"I don't know. Maybe it is a grown-up rat, is full here in the country," Sam replied, tightening her arms more tightly on her chest. Beside her, Barley grumbled.

Alex's expression turned into a grimace as he mimed her, raising his eyes to the sky "Funny. Very funny," he complained, approaching to pet the puppy "I didn't know you had a dog," he admitted amazed, looking at Sam.

"Is something new" admitted the cheerleader, "if you came to exchange some stupid complacency then you could pass by the front door, my father always complains of not receiving many visits," she addressed him, turning to look at him, sliding her hands over the mattress "so you have something to tell me, or not?"

Alex shrugged, indifferent, "I don't know," he mumbled, returning to concentrate entirely on his girlfriend "you have something to tell me?" he challenged her, raising his chin and studying her from above.

"No, apart from that, I had everything under control, and you shouldn't have bothered," she commented, clapping her hand on the bed without looking away from the redhead.

Alex snorted, shaking his head "Oh yes, of course" he teased her "I saw how you had everything under control" the boy's face suddenly became grim, hard, as he took a step forward towering over Sam

"You were *flirting* with him" he exclaimed, contracting his jaw. One of his hands, clenched in a fist at his sides, ran to the girl's chest, pointing at her with a forefinger.

Sam felt his fingertip pressing against the meat above her breastbone. That gesture burned. Too much.

The brunette rose to her feet like a spring, taking a step forward without letting herself be intimidated. "First, lower your voice if you don't want my father to hear you from downstairs," she warned him, harshly, chasing away the boy's hand he kept pressing against her "and secondly, it was not my intention to give that idea, I just wanted to make the newcomer understand who was in charge" she justified herself by spreading her arms.

"Oh, and you did it great," Alex quipped, nervously chewing on the inside of his cheek as he gave her a mocking smile "because you can never let it go, do you? You always have to do it your way!" he exclaimed, narrowing his eyelids, looking for a minimum sign of repentance in her.

Sam snorted, looking away and shaking her head "Lucky that I have you put me back on the right path. Because you're so perfect and you're never wrong," she split, taking a few steps away from her boyfriend. Suddenly Alex's presence in that room seemed suffocating.

The redhead chased her, not allowing her to look for a chance to escape "Less than you surely," he confirmed sharp, forcing Sam to face him.

Sam's eyes widened in disbelief. "Because it's always like that with you. I'm always wrong, and you're always right, regardless of my reasons."

"Yes! As long as your reason, like a child! Your actions have consequences. It is good that you start to learn it," the boy thundered over her.

"Fantastic," Sam murmured, Alex's profile becoming blurred, and Sam felt her eyes pinch. She turned, not wanting to leave the satisfaction of seeing her cry, but when she spoke again, her voice was strangled,

"so you came here just to give me your usual life lessons?"

Alex looked down, sighing. "No," Sam heard him approaching until one of the boy's calloused hands went to look for one of hers. Gently, Alex forced her to turn around "I didn't come here to fight... I wanted to make peace," he admitted, sketching a smile.

Sam pushed his head away, angrily "Then try again," she muttered, pulling back her hands and crossing them against the chest.

Alex snorted. "Come on ... I know you can't sulk at me," he teased her, starting to kiss her neck.

Sam felt the boy's fingers slipping under the hem of her pajama shirt, tickling her stomach.

She struggled weakly, knowing that it would be so useless. Alex was right: she would give up.

It was always like that with him in each quarrel.

It seemed to Sam that the matter was still open, that there was still more to discuss. She hated to be silenced with some sweet talk, but Alex didn't allow her to continue to face the subject. He distracted her with something else, trying to make her laugh or looking for physical attention, pressing to make peace when Sam still seemed confused.

She felt that something was wrong. But she couldn't say precisely what.

But in the end, Barley ended up locked out of the room, and Alex slipped into Sam's bed.

"Do you think I don't know, Murray?" Eric Foster cut him off sharply, straightening himself in the office . Foster caught the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger, closing his eyelids. He had lost track of time; he didn't know how long that conversation had gone on beyond dinner time.

The only thing he knew was that he was exhausted.

"So why Hawkins? You're in the wolf's den. That city is destined to be caught in the crossfire: Americans, Russians, and who knows what

else" Murray's voice rasped inside the receiver and straight into his ear. His words now continued to echo in his head.

Mr. Foster sighed, extinguishing the cigarette in the ashtray in front of him.

"I have to stay here," Eric ruled, leaning wearily on the seat.

Murray, on the other side of the phone, sighed, there was a brief pause, "Cryptic as usual, isn't it?"

Mr. Foster didn't answer, smiling faintly against the phone.

"What do you think you find there? You should think about your children," his old friend scolded him.

Eric absently grabbed a frame from the corner of the massive wooden desk, watching it with a faint smile "It's for them that I do it. This story must end Murray. I'm tired of hiding. I do it for them. I can't leave them knowing they're in danger."

There was another long silence.

Murray's voice was lower this time as if he were muttering. "If the story comes out, it will make a big bang," he seemed to say more to himself than to his interlocutor.

Mr. Foster smiled, putting the photograph back in its place, "I hope so," he admitted with ill-concealed satisfaction.

"Let me tell you from an old fool ... nobody will believe it. I've been trying for years since you put me in this story," the man on the other side of the receiver warned him.

"I know Murray, I know," Eric sighed, leaning his head back "that's why I need time, I need to find a way to destroy them before they find us."

"You're in the wolf's den," Murray repeated.

Mr. Foster chuckled, fiddling with the phone cord, "You should know that I don't like simple country walks."